Ayatollah Ja'far Subhani

Resplendence of *Wilayah*

An Analytical Biography of Imam 'Ali

"Those who generate the waves which move human societies are the formidable characters that make history," writes Ayatollah Ja'far Subhani in his introduction to this important work detailing the life and work of the first Imam. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib generated waves through divinely instituted means of guidance, bringing to fruition the inherent dignity and nobility of human society and building upon the foundations of human civilisation laid by the Prophet.

After the completion of Ayatollah Ja'far Subhani's biography of the Prophet, *Resplendence of Eternity*, the next logical step was to apply the same method to compose a biography about Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Thus, *Resplendence of* Wilayah came into being. Well-referenced and astutely researched, it divides the life of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Commander of the Faithful, into five periods: his early life; his life after the Prophetic mission (*bi'thah*) began; his life after the migration to Medina; his life after the death of the Prophet and before his own assumption of the caliphate; and his caliphate until his martyrdom.

It is distinguished by a thoughtful and philosophical approach, which situates the dynamics of 'Ali's life into the broader context of human history. Comprehensive, readable, and reliable, it offers detailed insight into the life of this great man.

⁂

Ayatollah Ja'far Subhani (b. 1929) is a high-ranking Shi'i scholar (*marja'*), theologian, jurisprudent, Qur'anic exegete, and a distinguished teacher at the Hawzah of Qum. His thematic approach to the exegesis of the Qur'an is reflected in his *Manshur-i Jawid* (The Eternal Charter, 14 vols.) and *Mafahim al-Qur'an* (The Concepts of the Qur'an, 7 vols.), among others. A prolific author, he has written many books on a wide array of subjects, including theology, Islamic sects, heresiography (*al-milal wa al-nihal*), hadith transmission authorities, contextual analytical study of hadith (*dirayah*), principles of hadith, philosophy, principles of jurisprudence, jurisprudence, history, fundamentals of belief (*'aqa'id*), and biographies of Shi'i luminaries. He has edited 12 classical sources written before the thirteenth century AD.

THE ISLAMIC COLLEGE
ICAS Press

ISBN: 978-1-907905-48-3
9 781907 905483

Image: A twelve sided star in the centre hearkens to the twelve infallible Imams.

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Ja‘far Subhani

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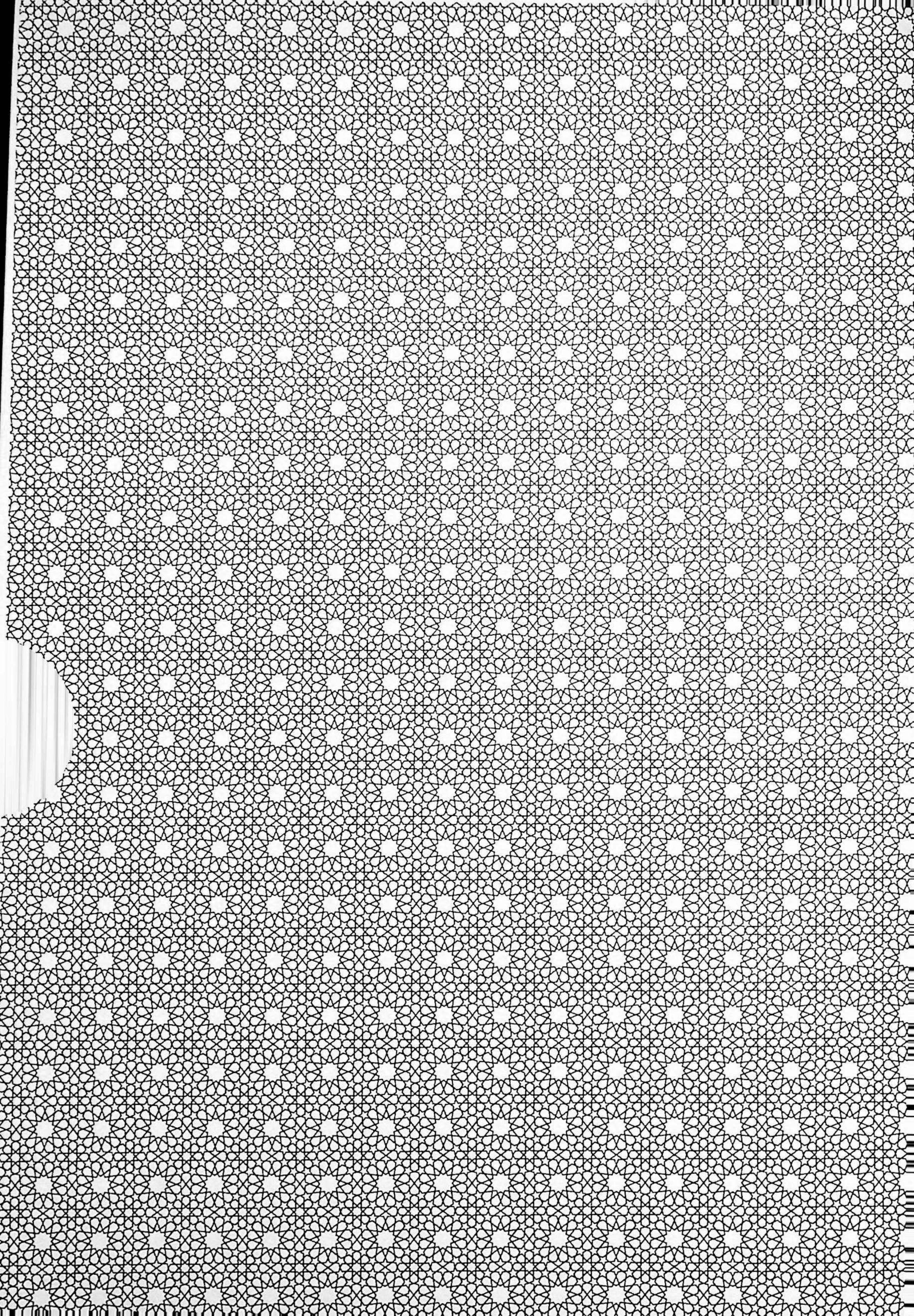

Resplendence of *Wilāyah*
An Analytical Biography of Imam ʿAlī
(*Furūgh-i Wilāyat*)

Ayatollah Jaʿfar Subhani

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ICAS Press
London
2019

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ICAS Press
133 High Road
London NW10 2SW
United Kingdom

ISBN: 978-1-907905-48-3 (pbk)

Cover, book design and typesetting by scholarlytype.com
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Printed and bound in the United Kingdom

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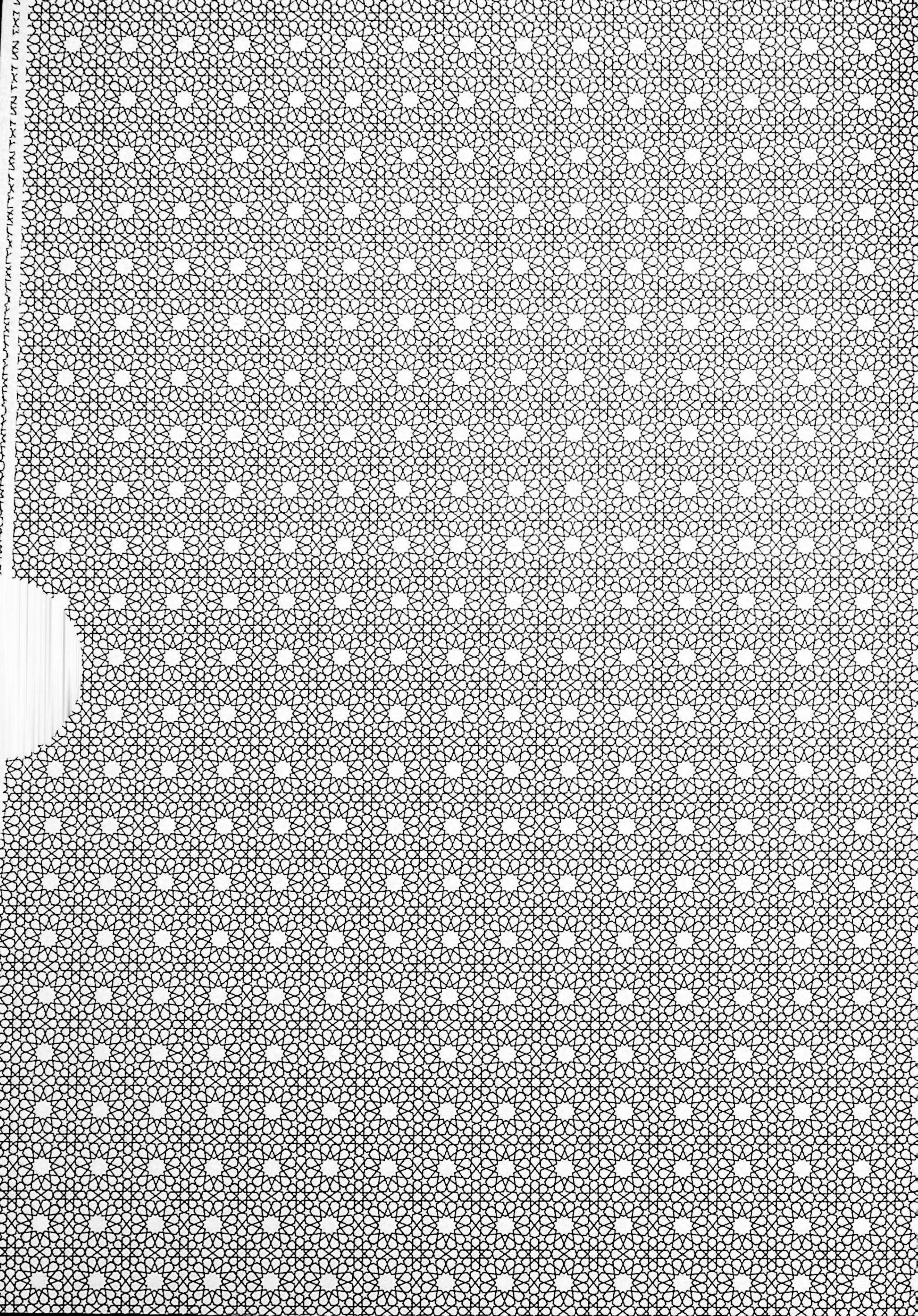

Introduction

In a certain respect, human society can be compared to a calm sea. Some parts of it dry up with the passage of time, and even disappear altogether; the movement of its waves comes about through winds – sometimes gentle breezes, at other times mighty storms. The storms and the winds generate waves, which shape the destiny of the vessels that sail through its waters. Some waves destroy the vessels, and mete out death; others are saviours and bestow life.

Those who generate the waves which move human societies are the formidable characters that make history: sometimes they bring about destruction and misfortune, at other times they lead the way to true life and eternal felicity. Doubtless, divinely appointed leaders and great messengers of God, together with their pure and noble representatives, are creators of waves – waves of unerring guidance, which carry the vessel of human society to the shores of salvation and perpetual happiness, along the path that nurtures wisdom and reason, and leads mankind to the everlasting abode. It is thus that true civilisation is established on the foundation of values both human and divine.

These magnificent 'creators' of waves are in constant battle with evil and wickedness. But, through divinely instituted means of guidance, they succeed in bringing to fruition the inherent dignity and nobility of human society. As history bears witness, wherever the light of divine revelation has shone, human wisdom has flourished, and hence human civilisation has progressed.

The Prophet of Islam was a veritable light that illuminated the heart of humanity which had become darkened by ignorance and idolatry, and brought knowledge of the angelic potential of humanity into a world afflicted with demonic tendencies. He laid the foundations for a civilisation which is among the most fruitful and beautiful that the world has yet seen. If and only if the Muslims had followed the path that the Prophet established for Muslim society – avoiding disputation, factionalism, egotism and bigotry – even sweeter and more luscious fruits could most certainly have been picked from the blessed tree of Islamic civilisation over the course of the past fourteen hundred years. The Muslims would have been able to protect the majesty and dignity of Islam against the corruption and injustice of a hostile world. But alas, after the heart-rending departure of the final prophet from this world, disputes, quarrels, self-aggrandisement, and ambition engulfed sections of the Muslim community, giving rise to a major and serious deviation from the divinely appointed path of guidance, and causing grave damage to the correct principle of leadership.

In truth, what was the cause of this unhappy state of affairs? And what caused the Muslims to follow the path of ingratitude and rebellion? It would appear that the ingratitude and unhappiness of the people at that time was due to their opposition to the imam whom the Prophet had, on numerous occasions, ordained for them. The sad and regrettable outcome of the opposition and ingratitude was that the most pious, virtuous, and wisest statesman – after the Prophet of Islam – imposed on himself a silence and confinement for twenty-five years. The only thing he was able to do was prevent the outbreak of divisiveness in the newly established Islamic society of that time.

Indeed, it can be said that the society of that time not only failed to recognise ʿAlī as imam, but also was incapable of perceiving even a fraction of his wide-ranging virtues. But after this period of self-imposed isolation which, in the Imam's own words, was like a thorn in the eye and a bone in the throat, when the deviations from the straight path of the Prophet's mode of leadership were completely evident, and the Muslims were eager to regain what had been lost, they approached their true leader and their great teacher, in order that he might, once again, put an end to deviation, and establish the just order desired by the Prophet. Although they gave their oath of allegiance to ʿAlī in pursuit of this sacred goal, and he in turn pledged to them that the time was ripe for the establishment of a just and equitable order, due to deep-rooted and widespread deviation in the society such a rectification was not possible without fighting against the deviators.

Consequently, the period of the caliphate of this great man and role-model of faithfulness was dominated by civil war: it opened with battles against those who had broken their oath of allegiance (Nākithīn) and finished with an effort to uproot the apostates (Māriqīn). Finally, as a result of this last battle against the Khawārij, he was assassinated by the most wretched of their number, thus imbibing the nectar of martyrdom in a house of God, the mosque of Kufa, just as he was born in the House of God, the Kaʿbah. Thus, his most blessed and majestic life was spent traversing the path that led from one sacred place of worship to another.

About this Book

The life of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Commander of the Faithful, can be divided into five periods:

1. the early life of Imam ʿAlī, prior to the *biʿthah* (mission) of the Prophet;
2. his life after the *biʿthah* (onset of the Prophet's mission) and before the *hijrah* (migration);
3. his life after the *hijrah* and before the Prophet's death;
4. his life after the death of the Prophet and before his own assumption of the caliphate;
5. the period of his own caliphate until his martyrdom.

The parts of this book are based on the above periods. A clear and corroborated account of the life of the Imam is thus presented. It has been our endeavour in this work to avoid every kind of exaggeration and baseless speculation. We have tried to refer only to primary and well authenticated sources, and to do so only to the extent necessary to clarify the essential aspects of his life, rather than engage in a verbose discourse or enter into tedious repetitions that would tire the reader.

At the time when the present writer completed the biography of the Prophet entitled *Resplendence of Eternity* (*Furūgh-i Abadiyyat*) a decision was taken to write a biography of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the first Imam, according to the same method. By the grace of God, this intention was brought to fruition in the form of a volume containing four chapters of his life. But as a result of the spread of deviant and heretical doctrines such as Marxism, in the open and free atmosphere generated by the Islamic revolution, our attention was directed to the refutation of these doctrines, and we were unable to complete the biography. After some time, we were able to resume the work, and benefit from the grace of completing the work, with the writing of those chapters concerning the most sensitive and famous periods of his life. Thus a complete biography of this luminous personality, from an analytical and authentically corroborated point of view, and in a form appropriate to the culture of our times, can now be dedicated to the shrine of his blessed memory.

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It must be pointed out that the present book is designed to portray the personal as well as public life of the Imam, but we have not been able to cover in a comprehensive manner such important aspects of his life and thought as his knowledge and learning; asceticism and devotion; virtues and merits; sermons and discourses; treatises and letters; aphorisms and maxims; debates and dialogues; his companions and their biographies; his miracles and marvels; his legal rulings and unsurpassable judgements, and such like. Each of these subjects would require a separate volume.

The author of this work frankly confesses that he has been unable to illuminate even half of the brilliant countenance of this great leader's life. Yet it is his privilege to be one of the ardent followers of the Joseph of his time, to make this token offering to his memory, even though it is not equal to even a single one of the hairs of his blessed body. But what else can we do?

Not everything that a man wishes comes to him;
The winds carry the boats where they do not want to go.

It is also a great pleasure that this work can be presented to the lovers of that great personage on the occasion of the 1,400th anniversary of the Prophet's official declaration of the *wilāyah* (authority) and caliphate of Imam ʿAlī, that is, 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1410, the Eid of Ghadīr Khumm.

Jaʿfar Subhani
Imam Sadiq Institute, Qum
15 Rajab 1410 / 22 Bahman 1368 / 11 February 1990

Part 1

The Life of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib before the Advent of the Prophetic Mission (*biʿthah*)

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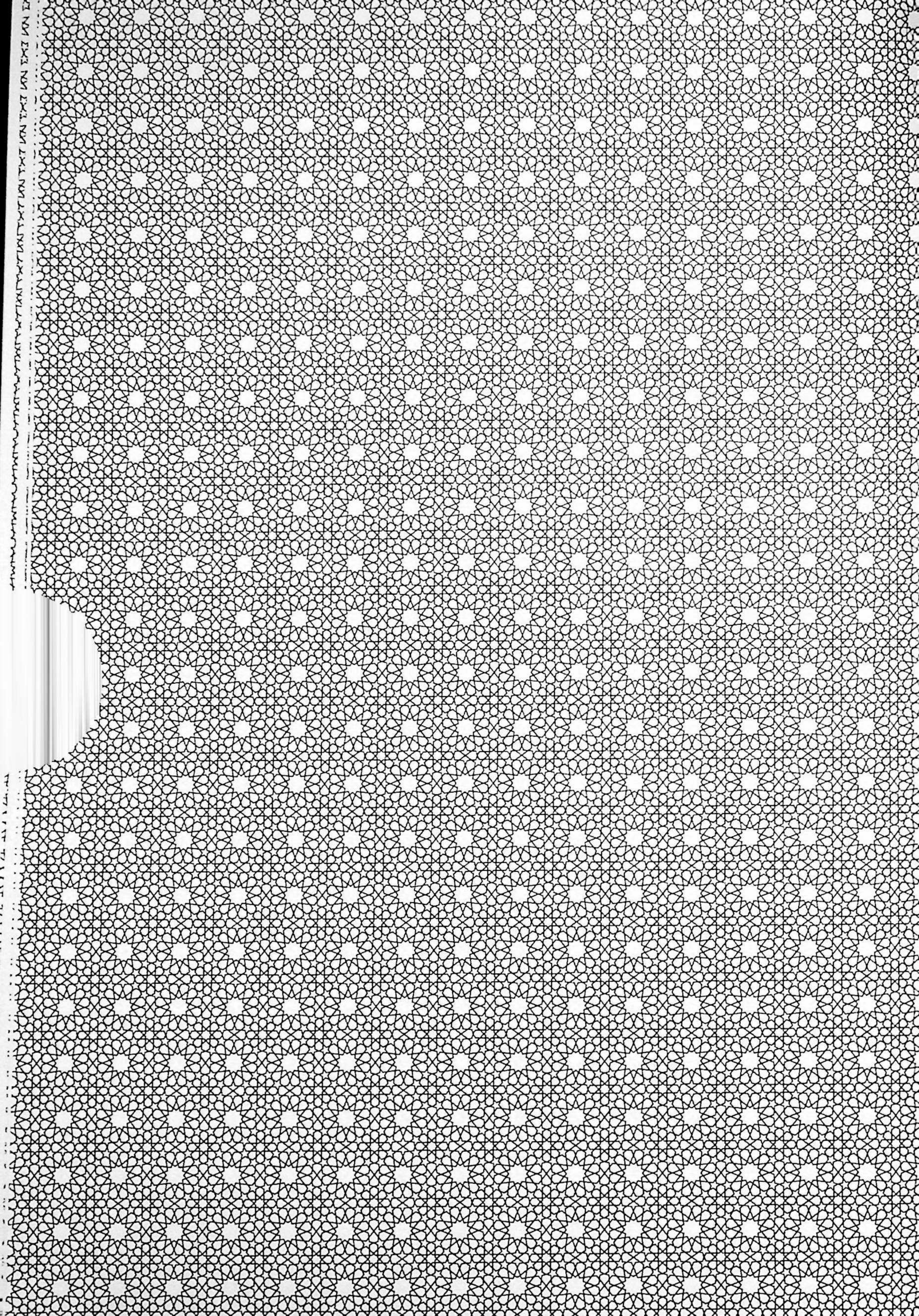

The Life of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

Friends and Foes of Great Men

The great personalities of the world are subjected to many different and sometimes contradictory judgements. There will be those whose love is such that they become oblivious to their own selves, and, like moths flying into a flame, are ready to give up their very being for the sake of their beloved friend. They will be willing, with all their heart, to endure any kind of abuse and even torture out of their love for such personalities. In contrast, there will be others having such an abhorrence and obstinate opposition to these personalities that they would never be prepared to restrain the hand of enmity for the sake of peace and reconciliation. The love and hatred of these people can acquire such intensity that they recognise no boundaries, traversing time and space, extending through all ages and places. It is, however, the sublimity and grandeur of the personality that will always, in the final analysis, determine the intensity and persistence of his influence.

Among the great personalities of the world, no one has been subject to such a degree of contradictory judgements as has ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, upon whom be blessings and peace.[1] Rarely have opinions been as polarised between attraction and repulsion as they were in regard to him. Among the most illustrious personalities known to us in history, perhaps it is only the Prophet Jesus who can be compared with him in this respect; for he also drew to himself two diametrically opposed groups. These two exalted personages were similar as regards eliciting extremes of both friendship and animosity.

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[1] This salutation, *ʿalayhi al-ṣalāt wa al-salām*, is to be understood after every mention of his name and those of the other imams and also the prophets. Whereas in Arabic and Persian the utterance or writing of this salutation is natural, in the English language it is cumbersome, and thus will not be made in this book, though it must always be understood as implicit. [Translator]

According to the majority of the Christians of the world, Jesus Christ is God incarnate who descended upon the earth to redeem sinful human beings who inherited 'original sin' through their forefather, Adam, and who was finally crucified. Virtually all Christians believe that his human nature was subordinate to his divine nature. In total contrast, some Jews formed a vehement opposition to him; they accused him of being an impostor and a liar. They uttered the most obscene calumnies – which the pen is ashamed to write – upon his most pure mother.

A similar kind of polarisation of opinions took place in regard to 'Alī. One group, out of limited capacity, narrow-mindedness, and extreme devotion, elevated him to the station of divinity, taking the acts of grace that were performed throughout his life as evidence of his divine nature. Unfortunately, this group adopted the sacred title 'Alawī [lit., 'of, or pertaining to, 'Alī'], and today have many followers. It is regrettable that until now Shi'a Islam has not been able to utilise this overflowing affection in order to unveil 'Alī's true personality to them and thereby guide them to the path of true oneness (*tawḥīd*), for the sake of which 'Alī devoted his entire life.

In direct opposition to this group, there arose others who, from the very outset of his caliphate, bore enmity against him in their hearts. As time passed such groups came to be known as the Khawārij (seceders) and the Nawāṣib. The Prophet Muḥammad was well aware of the fact that these unorthodox groups would appear in the time of 'Alī's caliphate, when he stated 'Two groups will perish on account of you – one group that exaggerates its love for you; and another that vents its hatred on you.'[1]

Another similarity between Jesus and 'Alī is their place of birth; Jesus was born in a holy land called Bethlehem, and in this respect enjoys a certain superiority over the other prophets sent to the Children of Israel; similarly, 'Alī was born in a miraculous way in the holy land of Mecca in the House of God itself, the Ka'bah; and he was destined to be martyred in another house of God, the mosque of Kufa. So, an excellent end matched an excellent beginning, and this was unprecedented, so that it is altogether appropriate that it should be said of him: 'how excellent a beginning and how excellent an end!'

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorism 117 gives *fiyya* instead of *fī-ka*.

The Tripartite Personality of 'Alī

From the point of view of psychology, the personality of each individual consists of three important factors, each of which has a distinctive impact on the articulation and formation of character; and it appears that the spiritual conditions, the personal attributes, and the manner of intellectual reflection is likewise threefold, the total personality appearing when these three factors are joined together. These three factors consist of: heredity, education, and environment.

The qualities and attributes – good or evil – will grow and develop on the basis of these three elements. As regards heredity, very briefly, we should point out: our children inherit not only our outward forms and features but also our inner nature, mental states, and behavioural traits. Education and environment, which give form to the other two aspects of the human personality, play an important role both in the development of the natural disposition entrusted to the individual by the Creator, and in the blossoming of the qualities inherited by the child from its parents. A good teacher can change the destiny of a child or even of a whole class of students. Often the environment can transform a pure child into an impure one and vice versa. The power of these two factors in the formation of human character is so obvious that there is no need for further explanation. Nevertheless one must never forget that above and beyond these factors, that which ultimately prevails is the will and the aspiration of the human being.

The Inherited Personality of 'Alī

'Alī's father was Abū Ṭālib, an eminent leader in the tribal society of the Quraysh of Mecca and the chief of the Banū Hāshim clan. His being was suffused with the qualities of tolerance and generosity, compassion and kindness; his entire life was selflessly devoted to the cause of *tawḥīd*. The Prophet was only eight years old when his grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, passed away. From that day onwards, for the next forty-two years, it was Abū Ṭālib who undertook the duty of taking care of the orphan, at home and when journeying; with love and unequalled devotion he made sacrifices on all planes for the sake of the holy cause of his nephew: the spread of the worship of the one, true God. This truth figures in many of the poems recorded in the *dīwān* attributed to Abū Ṭālib. For example:

> Let all of good will know that Muḥammad,
> is a prophet, as were Moses and Jesus, son of Mary.[1]

And likewise:

> Do you not know that we found Muḥammad to be,
> a prophet, like Moses, as described in the early scriptures?[2]

Such devotion to the cause of Islam, which resulted in the banishment of the entire clan of Banū Hāshim to a parched, barren valley, could not but arise out of a deep love for the cause of Islam and an unflinching attachment to spiritual truth; ties of kinship, together with material motives and interests are unable to generate such a spirit of self-sacrifice in a human being. So compelling are the signs and proofs of Abū Ṭālib's faith in the religion brought by his nephew that all impartial scholars find themselves attracted by him. Unfortunately though, a group, out of unjustified biases have remained silent about him and another group have gone so far as to describe him as a disbeliever – this, despite the fact that if even a fraction of the indications of his Islam that are recorded in the historical sources and collections of hadiths were to be found in respect of any other person, there would be no doubt on anyone's part as regards the faith of that person. But it is mysterious how all these proofs and signs are insufficient to enlighten the hearts of some people.

The Personality of the Mother of ʿAlī

ʿAlī's mother was Fāṭimah bint Asad ibn Hāshim. She was one of the first women to believe in the Prophet, and, before the prophetic mission began, she followed the religion of Abraham. She was a pious woman who, in the moment of the most extreme pangs of childbirth, made her way to the Sacred Mosque, and near the wall of the Kaʿbah made this supplication: 'O God, I have firm faith in you and the prophets and the scriptures you have revealed, and in my ancestor, Abraham, who built this [holy] House. O Lord, for the honour of him who built this House, and for the right of the child I bear in my womb, make easy the birth of this baby.' Hardly a moment had passed before Fāṭimah, wondrously, entered the Kaʿbah, and gave birth.[1]

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[1] *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 4, p. 37.

[2] Ibid.

This great distinction has been transmitted by a large number of Shiʿa traditionists, historians, and genealogists. A considerable number of Sunni scholars have also made explicit reference to this fact, viewing it as an unrivalled distinction.[2] Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī writes: 'The fact that ʿAlī was born within the Kaʿbah is among the hadiths classified as *mutawātir*.'[3] Ālūsī al-Baghdādī, the author of a famous commentary of the Qur'an, writes as follows: 'The birth of ʿAlī in the Kaʿbah is well known throughout the regions of the world, and to this day, nobody else has had this distinction.'[4]

In the Care of the Prophet

When one divides the life of ʿAlī into five periods, the first will always be that stage of his life that was spent with the Prophet prior to the advent of the prophetic mission (*biʿthah*). This stage of ʿAlī's life was no longer than ten years; when he was born, the Prophet was just thirty years old, and the latter's mission began when he was forty years old.[5]

The most sensitive events of this period of ʿAlī's life, those which determined the formation of his character, according to the second of the three factors noted above – that of education and training – came about under the guiding influence of the Prophet. In any person's life, this early stage of life is of fundamental significance. The character of a young child is like a blank sheet of paper, prepared to receive whatever be written on it; and this stage of life presents those bringing up the child with the best opportunity to foster and bring to fruition those pure qualities and spiritual virtues that have been woven into the soul of the child by its

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[1] Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 90.

[2] See, for example, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 349; *Sharḥ al-Shifā'*, vol. 1, p. 151, etc.

[3] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 483. [A *mutawātir* saying is one that is transmitted through so many chains of narration that its authenticity is regarded as being beyond doubt, thus possessing the highest degree of authenticity – Translator.]

[4] ʿAbd al-Bāqī Afandī, *Sharḥ-i Qaṣīdah*, p. 15.

[5] A number of sources like Ibn Khashshāb's *Mawālīd al-A'immah* state that ʿAlī, at the time of the *biʿthah*, was 12 years old, in which case he lived until he was 65; see also *Kashf al-Ghummah* of ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Irbilī (d. 693 AH / 1294 CE), vol. 1, p. 65.

Creator; and to impart to the child those moral values and principles which lead to a life of true happiness and fulfilment.

The Prophet, aiming at achieving such an exalted goal, assumed the responsibility of raising ʿAlī since his birth. When ʿAlī's mother took her infant to the Prophet she noticed his keen interest in her infant. The Prophet asked her to place ʿAlī's cradle beside his bed; as a result, ʿAlī enjoyed the Prophet's deep interest. He not only would rock ʿAlī's cradle while the infant was asleep, but he would give him milk and talk kindly to him when the infant was awake. He pressed ʿAlī to his breast at times, saying, 'This child is my nephew and will be my trustee, supporter, close friend, and my daughter's husband.'

The Prophet would never part with ʿAlī because of his deep affection for him. He took ʿAlī with him like a little brother or a beloved child when he left the city for spiritual retreat and prayer.[1] In his taking care of the child he intended to shape the second aspect of ʿAlī's personality – education – and in so doing serve as the only factor in shaping his personality.

The Commander of the Faithful (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) pays tribute to the Prophet's valuable interest and care, saying, 'O companions of the Prophet! You are well aware of my close family ties with the Messenger of God and the particular esteem in which he held me. You know that I was raised in his affectionate arms. He would press me against his breast when I was an infant. He would take care of me when I was asleep. He would caress me and I would smell his sweet smell and he would feed me.'[2]

The Prophet takes ʿAlī to his Home

As it was the divine will that the great saint (*walī*) of His religion be brought up in the Prophet's home, under the direct guidance of the Prophet, God directed the Prophet's attention to this important matter. Muslim historians record that at the time of a great drought in Mecca, Abū Ṭālib, a paternal uncle of the Prophet, was confronted with a large family and heavy expenses. The Prophet, together with another uncle, ʿAbbās, who was wealthier than Abū Ṭālib, agreed that in order to relieve the situation, each would foster one of the sons of Abū Ṭālib. Hence, ʿAbbās took Jaʿfar, and the Prophet took care of ʿAlī.[1]

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[1] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 90.

[2] The Qāṣiʿah Sermon, *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), vol. 2, p. 182.

From that time onwards, ʿAlī's entire childhood was passed under the sole guardianship of the Prophet. Under such blessed auspices, guidance, and training, ʿAlī absorbed the radiant virtues of the Prophet, to the extent that he himself also reached the summit of spiritual perfection. ʿAlī himself refers to this glorious period and unique privilege thus: 'I followed him like a baby camel follows its mother. Every day, he taught me one of his virtues, and instructed me to live according to it.'[2]

ʿAlī in the Cave of Ḥirā'

Before the *biʿthah*, the Prophet used to spend the whole month of Ramaḍān each year in spiritual retreat in the cave of Ḥirā'. At the end of the month he would descend from the mountain and proceed straight to the Kaʿbah and make seven circumambulations around it before returning home. Bearing in mind his great affection and concern for ʿAlī, the question arises whether the Prophet would have taken the young boy with him to his retreat or whether he would have left him at such times. The evidence indicates that from the time that the Prophet took ʿAlī under his wing, he never left ʿAlī for a single day. According to historians, ʿAlī was so close to the Prophet that even in his retreats to the mountains and the deserts, ʿAlī always accompanied him.[3]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd states: 'According to a number of authentic hadiths, when the Archangel Gabriel first came to the Prophet and honoured him with the message (*risālah*), ʿAlī was also present. That happened during the months, when the Prophet retreated into the cave of Ḥirā'.' ʿAlī himself says in this regard: 'Every year the Prophet would retreat to the cave of Ḥirā', and nobody would see him apart from me.'[4] Although this sentence might be said to pertain to the period subsequent to the *biʿthah*, the context indicates the contrary, especially since the Prophet would make such retreats mostly in the period prior to the descent of the revelation. Given ʿAlī's purity of soul and the Prophet's continuous care for him, ʿAlī acquired such, a sensitive heart, penetrating vision and acute hearing that, though a child, he would see things and hear sounds which would not be seen and heard by ordinary people. 'Alī says himself in this connection: 'I saw the light of revelation and the message, and I smelled the fragrance of prophethood (*nubuwwah*).'[1]

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 236.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), vol. 2, p. 182.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, 13, p. 208.

[4] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 187 (known as Qāṣiʿah).

Imam Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq states: 'Before the *bi'thah*, 'Alī was able to perceive the light of the message and the sound of the archangel of revelation.' In a momentous statement, during the period when he was receiving the revelation, the Prophet told 'Alī: 'If I were not the last prophet, after me, you would be the one most worthy of the position of prophethood. But you are my executor (*waṣī*) and my heir (*wārith*); you are the leader of the legatees and the pious.'[2]

In regard to his hearing of sounds from the unseen as a child, 'Alī says: 'When the revelation descended upon the Prophet, I heard the sound of lamentation. I asked the Prophet what this was. He replied: "This is the cry of Satan; the reason for it is that once I was raised up as a prophet, his hope of being worshipped on the earth was dashed."' Then the Prophet faced 'Alī and said: 'Truly you hear what I hear and see what I see, except that you are not a prophet, rather, you are a *wazīr* (minister/helper) [to me].'[3]

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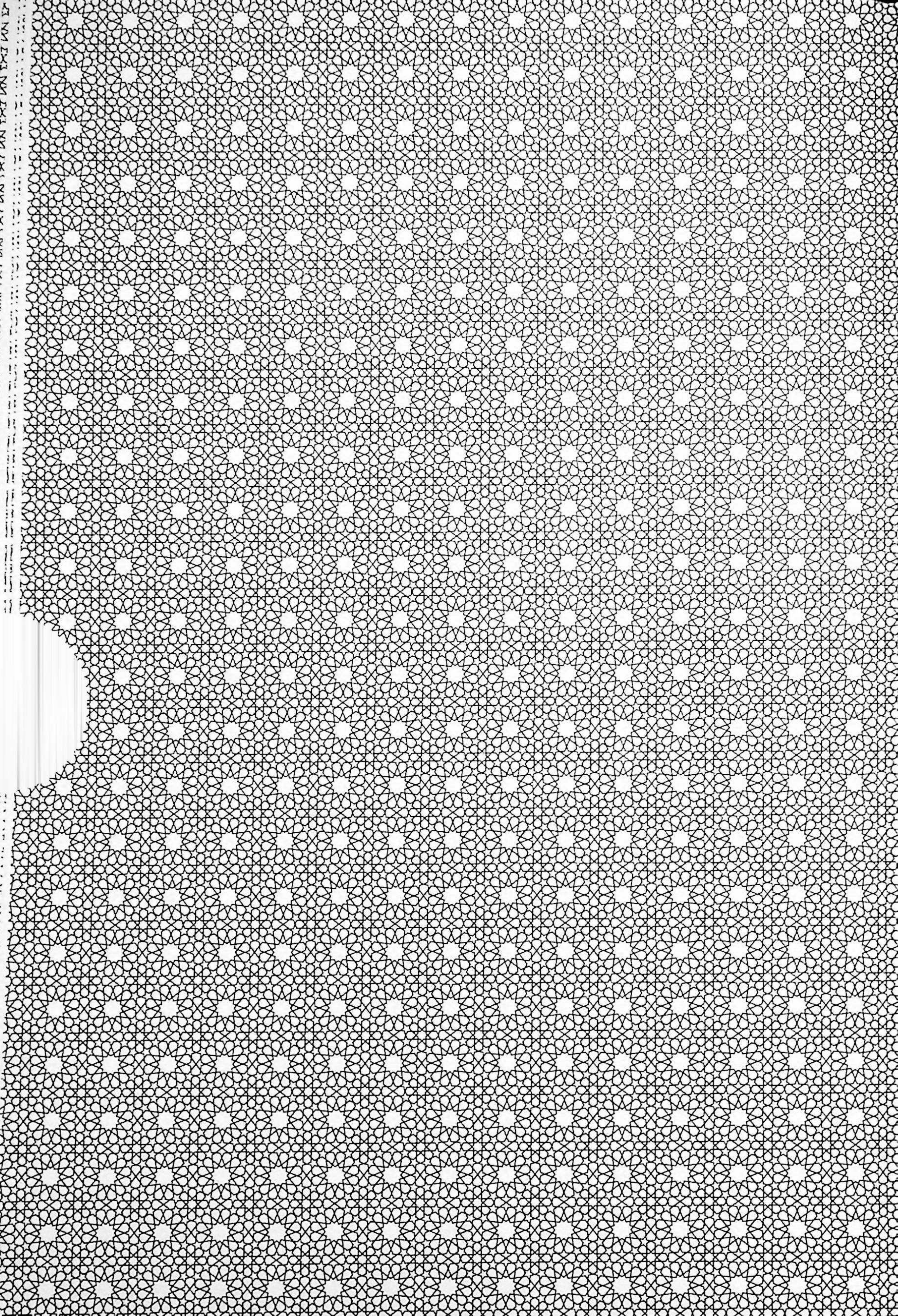
[1] Before the *bi'thah*, the Prophet perceived sounds from the unseen in a mysterious way, as mentioned in narrations. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 197.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 310

[3] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 187.

Part 2

The Life of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib from the Advent of the Prophetic Mission (*biʿthah*) until the Prophet's Migration (*hijrah*)



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The First Person who Entered the Religion of Islam

The second phase of Imam ʿAlī's life to be considered in the present work begins from the advent of the prophetic mission (*biʿthah*) and ends with the Prophet's migration (*hijrah*) to Medina. The length of this phase extends to approximately thirteen years, during which period ʿAlī was constantly at the Prophet's side, undertaking various tasks. It was in this period that ʿAlī earned various distinctions, which made him unrivalled throughout history. The first distinction to be mentioned here is that ʿAlī was the first male who entered the religion of Islam, or to be more precise, the first male who manifested and expressed outwardly his primordial *islām*, or inner submission to the will of God.[1]

The Qur'an has clearly referred to the question of those who have primordially resigned themselves to the will of God and as well those who have continually followed the religion of *tawḥīd* (affirmation of the divine oneness), stating that those who preceded the others in their surrender to the divine will, will also have precedence in respect of receiving the divine pleasure (*riḍwān*) and mercy.[2]

The question of precedence in embracing Islam has been given great significance by the Qur'an; those who devoted their lives and wealth to God and Islam before the conquest of Mecca are given a higher rank than those who became Muslim only after the conquest. Obviously, and according to the same principle, those who became Muslim surrendered themselves to Islam subsequent to the prophetic mission and before the Prophet's *hijrah* possess the highest station before God.[1]

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[1] This point will be explained in what follows.

[2] See Qur'an 56:10–11, 'And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near [to God]'.

By way of clarification, we may refer to the fact that the conquest of Mecca took place eight years after the Prophet's *hijrah*; it was also eighteen years after the *bi'thah* that the Prophet conquered this stronghold of the idolaters. The reason for the above mentioned precedence in faith is that the former group of Muslims believed in and supported the Prophet's mission at a time when Islam had not established any political authority over the Arabian peninsula, and when Mecca, the capital of the idolaters, still gave the appearance of an invincible citadel threatening the lives and properties of the Muslims. As a result of the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina, and consequently the acceptance of Islam by the tribes of Aws, Khazraj, and a number of other neighbouring tribes, the Muslims acquired a degree of power, and managed to win a number of battles; nonetheless, the threat from the enemy was not entirely removed. Thus a high rank and great respect is naturally to be accorded to those believers who were prepared to sacrifice all for the sake of Islam, at a time when the Quraysh were predominant. Then, in Mecca and among the companions of the Prophet, precedence in Islam, was regarded as a great honour, indeed, one to which no other virtue could be compared.

Once 'Umar, during his caliphate, asked Khabbāb, the sixth person who entered Islam and who suffered persecution, about how the idolaters of Mecca had treated him. Khabbāb removed his robe to show the caliph the deep wounds and burns on his back. He told 'Umar how, on several occasions, he was forced to wear heavy iron armour and stand for hours under the scorching heat of the Meccan sun; and how they used to set his body alight, casting him onto a fire, and then throwing him from side to side until the flames were extinguished.[2] Evidently, those who accepted such torture and hardship with all their being for the sake of Islam acquire a higher spiritual standing and are regarded as being graced with exceptional virtue.

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[1] See Qur'an 57:10, 'Not equal [to others] are those of you who spent and fought before the victory. They are greater in rank than those who have spent and fought afterwards'.

[2] *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 2, p. 99.

Nobody Preceded ʿAlī

According to accounts given by numerous historians and traditionists, the Prophet received his mission on a Monday, and the following day, ʿAlī affirmed this mission.[1] In a gathering of his companions, the Prophet affirmed ʿAlī's precedence in Islam, saying 'On the Day of Resurrection, the first person to meet me at the Ḥawḍ [the paradisal pool; Kawthar] will be the first of you who entered into Islam: ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.'[2]

In regard to this precedence of Imam ʿAlī, there are so many hadiths and narrations quoted from the Prophet, Imam ʿAlī himself, and the other great imams, and also from traditionists and historians, that the pages of this book could not contain all of them.[3] Therefore, we shall confine ourselves to a narration given by the Imam himself, and to an account given by ʿAfīf al-Kindī.

The Imam himself stated: 'I am the servant of God, and the brother of the Messenger of God, and I am *al-ṣiddīq al-akbar* ('the greater veracious one'). Nobody will make such a statement after me except for a liar and fabricator. I prayed with the Messenger of God, seven years before the people did, being the first person to pray with him.'[4]

In another saying Imam ʿAlī declared: 'In that day, Islam was only present in the house of the Prophet and Khadījah and I was the third member of the household.'[5] Elsewhere, ʿAlī states: 'O Lord, truly I am the first to turn towards You, the first who heard Your call and who replied. Nobody recited the prayer (*ṣalāh*) before me, except the Messenger of God.'[6]

ʿAfīf al-Kindī's narration:

> One day I entered Mecca in order to purchase clothes and perfume. I sat next to ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib in the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. When the sun reached its highest point, a man suddenly entered; he looked at the sky and then stood facing the Kaʿbah. Hardly did a moment pass

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 2, p. 112; *Istīʿāb*, vol. 3, p. 32.

[2] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 136.

[3] The late ʿAllāmah Amīnī has referred to various sayings and narrations on the subject in his *al-Ghadīr* (Najaf), vol. 3, pp. 191–213.

[4] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 213; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 57.

[5] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition)', Sermon 187.

[6] Ibid., Sermon 127.

> before a very young man joined him, standing to his right. Then a woman entered and stood behind the two of them. All three of them started to pray. This scene amazed me: three people separating themselves from their society, and worshipping a God distinct from the idols that their people were worshipping. I turned to ʿAbbās and said: 'What a tremendous thing!' He repeated the same words, and then asked, 'Do you know these three people?' I said 'No'. He said: 'The first person who entered, and stood before the other two was my nephew, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh. The second person is another nephew of mine, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. The third person is Muḥammad's wife. He claims that the religion he follows has been revealed to him from God. At this moment there is beneath the sky nobody apart from these three people who follows this religion.'[1]

Here it might be asked: if ʿAlī was the first person who believed in the Prophet's mission, what was his state prior to the advent of the prophetic mission – did he have faith? Bearing in mind the point made at the beginning of this chapter, it is obvious that the meaning of the word 'faith' here refers to a primordial, pre-existing faith ready to be unveiled; his life was already overflowing with this faith, and was never for a moment separated from it. For, as a result of the continuous and constant attention and care given to him by the Prophet, the roots of faith in the One God were planted in the depths of his soul and his whole being was suffused with faith and sincerity. After the advent of the prophetic mission, ʿAlī of course strengthened his oath of allegiance with the Prophet and also revealed his innate belief in the Prophet's message.

In the Qur'an, the words *īmān* (faith) and *islām* (submission) essentially refer to the re-affirmation of an innate and primordial belief in God: when Abraham was commanded to submit (*aslim*) himself to the will of God, he replied: '*I submit* (aslamtu) *to the Lord of the Worlds*' (2:131).

The Qur'an also says, referring to the words of the Prophet: '*I have been commanded to submit to the Lord of all the worlds*' (40:66)· Undoubtedly in such cases, '*islām*' refers to the re-affirmation of one's belief, primordially hidden in the innermost heart; it never means the acquisition of a faith that had previously been absent, because the Prophet, even before the revelation of this particular verse, or even before the advent of the prophetic mission, was an affirmer of the divine oneness, being a *muwaḥḥid*, permanently in a state of submission to the will of God. As a result, we may consider two degrees comprised within the principle of faith. Firstly, the unveiling of innate and primordial faith, already present within the innermost heart. This is precisely what is meant when speaking of ʿAlī's declaration of 'faith' on the second day after the advent of the prophetic mission. Secondly, the acquisition of a faith that had been absent previously, and the new acceptance of the faith referred to as Islam, in the sense of submission to God; and such is the 'faith' that many of the other companions of the Prophet came to acquire.

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[1] Al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 212; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 22; *Istīʿāb*, vol. 3, p. 330, etc.

The Debate between the Caliph Ma'mūn and Isḥāq

During his caliphate, Ma'mūn, either out of conviction or political considerations, declared his belief in Shiʿism, and also in the superiority of Imam ʿAlī. One day in a scholarly session, Ma'mūn addressed all of the forty invited scholars, including the renowned scholar Isḥāq, asking them the question: 'On the day of the *biʿthah*, what was the best act?'

Isḥāq replied: 'Affirmation of the Oneness of God and [the truth of] His messenger.'

Ma'mūn then asked: 'Was precedence in accepting Islam not the best act?'

'Yes', said Isḥāq, 'As the Qur'an states: "*And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near* [*to God*]" (56:10–11). The "foremost" here refers to precedence in accepting Islam.'

Ma'mūn continued: 'Was there anyone who preceded ʿAlī in accepting Islam, or was he the first to believe in the Prophet?'

Isḥāq replied: "Alī was the first person who affirmed the Prophet's message, but at the time, he was but a child; therefore, such affirmation has no value. But Abū Bakr, even though he entered the religion of Islam later, since at that time he was a mature individual, his belief had a distinct significance.'

Then Ma'mūn asked: 'How did ʿAlī believe – did the Prophet call him to Islam, or did God inspire him [ʿAlī] to accept the religion of oneness, and the way of Islam? One could never say that he received direct inspiration from God, because that would imply that ʿAlī's faith was higher than the Prophet's, since the manner of the Prophet's adherence to the faith was mediated by Gabriel and his guidance. The Prophet did not receive inspiration directly from God Himself.

'Now, even if Imam 'Alī's faith came about as a result of the Prophet's mission, did the Prophet make this call from his own will, or in obedience to the divine order? It could never be said that the Prophet made this call to 'Alī without God's permission and command; and it must definitely be affirmed that 'Alī's invitation to accept Islam was made by the Prophet in accordance with the will of God. Would the All-Wise give His prophet an order to invite a child to Islam, an immature child whose belief or disbelief is irrelevant? Therefore, it must be said that the intelligence and the understanding of the Imam [i.e. 'Alī] while still a child had already reached such a point that his faith was equal to the faith of adults.'[1]

Ma'mūn could also have given another answer, one that would be appropriate for those who have extensive knowledge of the issues concerning the principles of the imamate (*imāmah*) and vicegerency (*wilāyah*). In essence, the alternative answer is as follows: one must never regard the saints (*awliyā'*) and the prophets as ordinary human beings; seeing their youth as being identical to others, having the same degree of perception and understanding. Some prophets attained the highest degree of understanding and perfection and perception of [divine] realities, and in that same period of childhood were worthy of receiving revealed wisdom and lofty divine knowledge. In regard to John the Baptist, the Qur'an states: '*"O John! Hold on with power to the Book!" And We gave him judgement while still a child*' (19:12).

According to some scholars, the wisdom, referred to in this verse is that of *nubuwwah* (prophethood), while others believe that it signifies divine knowledge. In any case, the verse states that the prophets and saints (*awliyā'*) are endowed with an extraordinary receptivity; thus, the period of their youth is essentially different from that of ordinary human beings. As the Qur'an states, Jesus Christ, while having been an infant in the cradle, began to speak by the will of God: '*He said, "Indeed, I am a servant of God! He has given me the Book and made me a prophet*"' (19:30).

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[1] *Al-'Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 3, p. 43. After Isḥāq, Jāḥiẓ in his work *al-'Uthmāniyyah*, refers to this issue, and Abū Ja'far al-Iskāfī, in his *Naqḍ al-'Uthmāniyyah*, a critique of the work of Jāḥiẓ, gives an extensive reply to the questions posed by Jāḥiẓ. The whole debate is comprehensively covered by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd in his commentary on the *Nahj al-Balāghah* (vol. 13, pp. 218–295).

Biographical sources also refer to the ability of the infallible imams of Shiʿism to solve the most complicated intellectual, philosophical, and jurisprudential problems during their childhood.[1] As a matter of fact, the deeds of the saints must not be compared with those of ordinary people; in the same manner, the perception and understanding of the prophets and imams during their childhood are of an altogether different order of magnitude from those proper to ordinary children.[2]

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[1] For example, sources refer to the complicated problems set forth by Abū Ḥanīfah to Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far al-Kāẓim and also the queries posed by Yaḥyā ibn al-Aktham to Imam Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jawād.

[2] Imam ‘Alī states: ‘Nobody in this *ummah* can be compared to the family of the Prophet’ (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 2).

2

Preventing the Knowledge of 'Alī's Merits (*faḍā'il*) from being Disseminated

It is difficult to find a personality like 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in human history who has been subject to such an effort by followers and opponents alike to conceal his lofty virtues. In spite of this, many narrations and reports bear witness to his nobility and his excellence. The hostility of his opponents naturally led them to try and hide his spiritual station and rank; and as for his followers, even those who had deep adoration for him, were compelled, out of fear of persecution or execution, to seal their lips and not to express their love for him.

The ignoble efforts of the Umayyads to efface all trace of the virtues and merits of Imam 'Alī and his family must never be forgotten. It was enough that one be accused of being a follower of 'Alī, and for two persons from the entourage of the shameful government of the time to be ready to testify to this friendship, for the name of that person to be immediately removed from the register of state employees, thus ensuring the end of his salary from the public treasury. Mu'āwiyah dictated the following in a directive to his governors: 'If it be proved that a person is a follower and friend of 'Alī and his family, remove his name from the register, and deprive him of all salary and benefits.'

In another directive, he went even further, making an emphatic order that any persons outwardly professing love for 'Alī and his family should have their ears and nose cut off, and their homes destroyed. As a result of this command, such pressure was brought to bear on the people of Iraq, especially Kufa, and there was such fear of the secret agents of Mu'āwiyah, that no Shi'a dared to reveal his love for 'Alī and his family, except after receiving an oath that his secret would not be revealed.[1]

Al-Iskāfī writes as follows in his work *Naqḍ al-'Uthmāniyyah*: 'The Umayyads and the Abbasid governments were so sensitive as regard the excellences of 'Alī, that in order to stop all dissemination thereof, they summoned jurists, traditionists, and judges and ordered them never to relate any narrations authenticating these noble traits. It was thus that a group of traditionists were compelled to resort to indirect allusion in their reporting of the Imam's virtues, saying, 'A man of Quraysh did such and such!'[2]

In his third directive to his governors, Mu'āwiyah gave the instruction not to accept the testimony of any of the followers of 'Alī in any matters. But even such severe restrictions could not stop the dissemination of the Imam's *faḍā'il*, together with those of his family. Therefore, for a fourth time, Mu'āwiyah wrote to his governors, telling them to honour those who relate the merits of the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, and to send him their names and locations so that he might reward their help handsomely.

Such directives precipitated a process of fabrication of lies, in the form of forged reports pertaining to 'Uthmān's merits in order to gain the mentioned rewards. The situation, however, spiralled out of control, and things went so far in this direction that even Mu'āwiyah became disturbed at the extent of baseless reports about the third caliph; he issued another order that the traditionists should restrain themselves in regard to relating sayings about 'Uthmān's merits and to try and relate more reports about the merits and virtues of the first two caliphs, and also about the other companions. He further instructed that if a traditionist narrates a report concerning certain virtues of 'Alī, then an identical one to that should be forged and disseminated in relation to another of the companions. This, he considered, was a more effective way of undermining the foundations of the arguments and proofs proffered by Shi'a scholars.[3]

Marwān ibn Ḥakam used to say that no one protected 'Uthmān as 'Alī did. In spite of this, he was constantly cursing 'Alī. When people protested to him, asking how he could hold such an opinion while reviling him, he answered: the pillars of our government cannot be solid and stable unless

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 11, pp. 44–45.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 15.

ʿAlī is undermined and cursed. Even some people who were convinced of the purity, greatness and pre-eminence of the Imam ended up reviling him and his descendants for the sake of their rank and their position.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was reported as having said:

> My father was the governor of Medina, and he was among the most impressive of orators, delivering the Friday sermons with the utmost eloquence. But because of the directive given from the government in Damascus, he was obliged to curse ʿAlī and his descendants in the middle of his sermons. When he reached that point in the sermon, he would suddenly stammer, the expression of his face would suddenly change, and he would lose the thread of his speech. I asked my father the reason for this. He said: 'If others knew what I know about ʿAlī nobody would follow us. And I, despite knowing the lofty rank of ʿAlī, revile him; I am compelled to do so for the sake of the preservation of the status and position of the Marwanid family.'[1]

The hearts of the Umayyads were saturated with enmity towards ʿAlī. When a group of well-intentioned people advised Muʿāwiyah to cease his actions, he replied: 'This action will continue to the point where our children grow up with this thought, and our elders grow old in this condition'! For sixty years, throughout the areas controlled by Muʿāwiyah, the cursing and slandering of ʿAlī resounded from the pulpits of the mosques, in sermons and sessions of public preaching, and in study circles and hadith classes. This propaganda was extremely effective, as the following incident shows. It is said that one day Ḥajjāj spoke harshly to somebody from the tribe of Banū Azd. The latter turned to Ḥajjāj and said: 'O Commander! Do not talk to me in this manner; we are the proud possessors of many virtues.' Ḥajjāj asked what these were. He replied:

> One of our virtues is this: if someone wishes to marry into our family, first of all we ask him whether he likes Abū Turāb [i.e. ʿAlī] or not. If he has the slightest inclination in favour of him we never allow him to join us. Our enmity towards the family of ʿAlī is such that in our tribe no man can be found who is called Ḥasan or Ḥusayn, and no woman who is called

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[1] Ibid., vol. 13, p. 221.

> Fāṭimah. If one of our tribe is asked to revile 'Alī, he will immediately revile his family and descendants in addition.'[1]

As a result of the persistence of the Umayyads in concealing the Imam's excellences and virtues, eventually, the continuous reviling of him was regarded as a praiseworthy – even obligatory – upright practice among many people. When the caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz decided to try and remove this shameful policy and attitude from the state and society of his time, a group trained in Umayyad 'etiquette', criticised the caliph, asserting that he was trying to destroy the prophetic tradition (*sunnah*)!

Despite all their efforts, historical sources show that the intrigues and plots of the Umayyads were but lines drawn in sand. In fact these efforts backfired upon them; for the rays of the Imam's lofty virtues shone through and beyond the fog of propaganda generated by the Umayyad writers and preachers. The persistent denials of his enemies not only failed to diminish the love of the Imam in the hearts of the awakened; they also spurred people into making further research into the real personality and deeds of the Imam, far removed from the spurious claims forged by political intrigue. The situation had reached such a pitch that 'Āmir, the grandson of 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr, a staunch enemy of the Imam's family, advised his son to cease reviling the name of 'Alī, since the Umayyads had been cursing him for sixty years from the pulpits, and this had produced nothing but the elevation of the Imam's rank and honour, and the attraction of the hearts of the awakened to his cause.[2]

The First Companion

Concealing Imam 'Alī's traits and prejudice against the self-evident facts regarding his personality was not restricted to the Umayyads. Rather, this animosity against this perfect and archetypal human being continued on the part of his enemies and detractors, and prejudiced writers have not refrained from attacking the rights of the Imam and his family. Even nowadays, fourteen centuries after the advent of Islam, a number of thinkers, claiming to be in the vanguard of the present-day generation, assist the Umayyad aims with their poisonous pens, by drawing a veil over the Imam's traits. The way in which the following altogether fundamental historical episode is recounted furnishes one such example.

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[1] Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Farḥat al-Ghurā* (Najaf edition), pp. 13–14.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 221.

Divine revelation first descended upon the heart of the Prophet in the cave of Ḥirā' thus confirming him as a prophet and messenger. The angel of revelation, however, did not convey to him when he was to issue the general invitation (*da'wah*) to others to embrace the new faith. Therefore, for three years the Prophet refrained from making this general invitation, and it was only in private gatherings of small groups of qualified and receptive people, that he guided some individuals to the newly revealed faith. Then the bearer of revelation approached, issuing a decree from God that the Prophet should begin his mission with an invitation to his own relatives: '*Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk, and lower your wing to the faithful who follow you. But if they disobey you, say, 'I am absolved of what you do*' (26:214–216).

The reason for starting the mission with his own family resides in this: until those closest to a spiritual or social leader believe in him and follow him, his message will not influence other members of the society. For it is those closest to him that are conscious of his secrets and his states, his virtues and faults. So, the belief of the relatives in the bearer of the prophetic message is counted as evidence of his sincerity; conversely, the opposition of these relatives will indicate the insincerity of the one making a claim.

Therefore, the Prophet instructed 'Alī to invite forty-five important members of the Banū Hāshim to a feast consisting of meat and milk. All the guests came to the Prophet at the appointed time. After the meal Abū Lahab, a paternal uncle of the Prophet, began speaking thoughtlessly, thus making the ambience inappropriate for the presentation of the Prophet's call and the pursuit of the intended goal. The gathering was brought to an end without any result, and the guests left the home of the Prophet.

The Prophet decided that on the very next day he would prepare another feast, and invite all of them again except Abū Lahab. Once again, at the instruction of the Prophet, 'Alī prepared food and milk and invited all of the distinguished members of Banū Hāshim to partake of the meal and to listen to the words of the Prophet. Once again the guests arrived at the appointed time. After the meal the Prophet began to speak:

> Surely, no guide speaks lies to his own people. Even if I were to lie to others [an inconceivable situation], I would never lie to you; and if I were to deceive others, I would never deceive you. I swear by God – there is no god but Him – I have been sent by Him to you and to the entire world. Indeed, know that just as you sleep, so will you die, and just as you wake up, so will you be brought back to life. The righteous will be rewarded for their deeds, and the wicked will be punished for theirs; an everlasting paradise is prepared for the righteous, and everlasting hell is ready to receive the wicked. No one among mankind has brought anything for his people better than that which I have brought you. I have brought for you the good of this world and of the hereafter. My Lord has ordered me to call you to His oneness and to my message. Who among you will assist me in this affair, to be my brother, my executor (*waṣī*), and my successor (*khalīfah*)?

After speaking thus, he paused to see which of the assembled guests would reply to his invitation. At that moment, silence and astonishment governed the gathering; all heads were lowered in deep thought. All of a sudden, 'Alī, who was then no more than fifteen years old, broke the silence, stood up, faced the Prophet and said: 'O Messenger of God, I will assist you in this affair.' Then he extended his hand to the Prophet, offering it to the Prophet's in an oath of allegiance and self-sacrifice. The Prophet told 'Alī to be seated, and repeated his question. 'Alī stood up again, declaring his readiness to help the Prophet. Again, the Prophet told him to be seated. For the third time, 'Alī stood up to announce his support of the Prophet in his mission. This time, the Prophet took 'Alī's hand, and uttered the following words about 'Alī in this gathering of the elders of Banū Hāshim: 'O my kinsmen and relatives, know that 'Alī is my brother, my executor (*waṣī*), and my successor (*khalīfah*) among you.' According to al-Ḥalabī's *Sīrah*, the Prophet added the following: '...and my vizier and my heir (*wārith*)'.

In this way, the last messenger of God, at the very outset of the prophetic mission, appointed the first *waṣī* of Islam, at a time when none but a tiny group of people believed in the religion of Islam. Inasmuch as the Prophet declared his own prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and 'Alī's imamate (*imāmah*) on one and the same occasion, the significance and value of the imamate can be clearly appreciated; and in this light, the fact that these two stations, prophethood and imamate, are inseparable becomes evident. The function of imamate can therefore be grasped as that which complements and brings to completion the message of the Prophet.

The Historical Accounts of this Event

Historical evidence and reports testifying to the above-mentioned event have been narrated and strongly authenticated by Shi'a and non-Shi'a traditionists and commentators,[1] without any doubts being raised with regard to their chains of transmission or content. The foregoing event is one of the most firmly corroborated of all the merits of Imam 'Alī. Only the famous Sunni scholar Ibn Taymiyyah al-Dimashqī, whose manners of narrating hadiths on the noble traits of the Prophet's family are all too well known, has criticised the authenticity of the transmission chain of this historical event. Not only did he consider this hadith as forged and unfounded but, due to his peculiar opinions about the Prophet's family, he also regarded as groundless the hadiths relating the noble traits of the Prophet's family, even if they have the status of *mutawātir* narrations.

The author who annotated the history of Ibn Kathīr entitled *Kāmil*, without mentioning the name of his master, claims that his master believed the hadith in question is indeed a forged one (it seems that his master was also under the influence of Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion or else he simply found the hadith to be opposed to the succession of the first three caliphs). However, he comments upon the content of the hadith and says that 'Alī can be seen as the Prophet's executor at the advent of Islam, and this does not contradict the precedence of Abū Bakr as the successor of the Prophet, since at the time there was no Muslim except 'Alī to become the executor of the Prophet!

Debate and discourse with such people are futile; our main criticism is with those persons who narrate this hadith in some of their books in full, and in other books more ambiguously, which is somehow concealing the fact. Others who have published this hadith in its first edition have subsequently succumbed, due to external influences and pressure, such that following additions were not published. This is the main reason for our claim that such infringements of the Imam's rights that originated after the Prophet's passing away have continued to the present day.

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[1] See the comments made by commentators of the Qur'an on Sūrah al-Shu'arā', verse 214.

Concealing the Historical Facts

The prominent historian of Islam Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, in his *Ta'rīkh*, basing himself upon a trustworthy chain of transmission (*sanad*),[1] narrates this historical fact. However, in his *Tafsīr*,[2] when he arrives at the commentary of the Qur'anic verse '*Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk, and lower your wing to the faithful who follow you. But if they disobey you, say, "I am absolved of what you do"*' (26:214–216), he quotes the above-mentioned chain with ambiguity and abridgement. This can only be a sign of his prejudice. We have already mentioned that at the end of his invitation, the Prophet addressed the gathering and asked: 'Which of you will serve as my *wazīr* in that he will be my brother, my executor (*waṣī*), and my successor (*khalīfah*)?'

Al-Ṭabarī, however, has quoted this question as: 'Which of you will serve as my *wazīr* in that he will be my brother, and such and such?' that is to say, replacing the words 'my executor (*waṣī*) and my successor (*khalīfah*)' with the words 'such and such'.

There is no need to say that removing the words 'executor' and 'successor' and replacing them with ambiguous words (*kadhā wa kadhā*) shows nothing but a prejudice motivated by a wish to maintain the status of the first three caliphs. Not only did he change the words of the Prophet's question, but also, in the second part of the narration in which the Prophet, addressing 'Alī, said: 'Indeed, he is my brother and my executor (*waṣī*), and my successor (*khalīfah*)' (*inna hādhā akhī wa waṣiyyī wa khalīfatī*), al-Ṭabarī again resorted to an incorrect summary, using the words of *kadhā wa kadhā* instead of executor and successor – which are obvious testimonies to Imam 'Alī's designation as the immediate successor to the Prophet.

When Ibn Kathīr al-Shāmī, whose *Ta'rīkh* was written on the basis of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, was faced with the same corroborated report, he follows al-Ṭabarī's ambiguous and abridged way of narration in *Tafsīr*. But even worse than this is the distortion made by the contemporary Egyptian intellectual, Dr. Muḥammad Hasanayn Haykal, in his work entitled *Ḥayāt Muḥammad* (*The Life of Muḥammad*), which puts the credibility of his whole book in doubt. Firstly, while removing the second sentence of the Prophet – 'you are my brother, executor, and successor' – he only quotes the Prophet's question at the end of the aforementioned gathering. Furthermore, in the second and third editions of the same work, the author goes one step further and deletes even that part which had already been narrated. One can only speculate that the reason for this was that some prejudiced people had reproached him for including the narration in the first place, and persuaded him to delete it, thus further undermining the credibility of his book, and fuelling further the proper criticisms directed against it.

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[1] For this narration see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 216; see also al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, vol. 19, p. 74; Ibn Kathīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 24; al-Qāḍī al-'Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ Shifā*, vol. 3, p. 37; al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 321; etc. There is no need to quote from the numerous other versions of this narration given by historians, traditionists, and commentators.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 19, p. 74.

Al-Iskāfī's Narration

In his renowned work, *Naqḍ al-'Uthmāniyyah*, al-Iskāfī refers to this striking event in the history of Islam, in which 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib swore allegiance to the Prophet in the presence of his father, uncles, and other dignitaries of Banū Hāshim; and the Prophet honoured 'Alī by calling him his brother, executor, and successor. Al-Iskāfī narrates:

> Those who assert that Imam 'Alī's faith blossomed during his childhood, and that during this phase of life, one cannot discern between good and evil – what would they say as regards this event? Would it be reasonable for the Prophet to have given the responsibility of cooking food for a large gathering to a child? Would it be logical to instruct a mere child to invite them for a feast? Would it be inconceivable for him to share the mysteries of his prophethood with an immature child and, to take his hand, referring to him in front of all, as his brother, his executor, and successor? Surely not. On the contrary, one can but conclude that at the time in question, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was sufficiently intelligent and capable to be entrusted with the burden of those weighty responsibilities. One should bear in mind that this child had never frequented the company of other children, seeking them out nor joining in their games; rather, from the moment he extended his hand to swear allegiance to the Prophet, he firmly adhered to this pact, endeavouring always to act in accordance with his promise to the Prophet, and throughout all the moments of his life, he was ever the intimate companion of the Prophet.

> Not only was he the first person who affirmed the prophetic mission in that assembly, but also, when the dignitaries of the Quraysh asked for a miracle to authenticate the truthfulness of the Prophet's mission, and as a sign of his connection with God [by asking the Prophet to uproot a tree, making it move and then stand in front of them], again it was 'Alī, alone, who declared his belief, doing so in the face of the denial of all others.[1]

'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, himself refers to this event in one of his sermons:

> The Prophet asked: 'If God would do this [i.e. allow the miracle to be accomplished through the Prophet], will you affirm His oneness and my mission?' All replied in the affirmative. At that time, the Prophet supplicated to God, and the supplication was granted. The tree was uprooted and stood in front of the Prophet. The people who had asked for the miracle, however, took the path of enmity and disbelief; instead of affirming the Prophet they called him a sorcerer. But I turned my face to him and said: 'O Prophet! I am the first man to believe in your mission and I confess that the tree acted upon the command of God, to affirm your prophethood and to respect your speech.' At that moment, my affirmation weighed heavily upon the disbelievers, they replied: 'No one except 'Alī will believe in you!'[2]

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[1] Iskāfī, *al-Naqḍ al-'Uthmāniyyah*, p. 252; see also the comment on this by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, pp. 244–245.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 238 (known as Qāṣi'ah).

3

Selfless Heroism

The action and behaviour of an individual emanates from the fundamental beliefs and the guiding philosophy of that individual. A willingness to perform sacrifices for the sake of those beliefs, and utter dedication and devotion to those beliefs, are the signs of a real believer, one who has true faith. If human faith, or if a person's belief in a principle transcends personal interests, one's own wealth, and even one's own being, that is indeed a sign of perfection in achieving the goal of one's life, in realising the ultimate value embodied within that principle. Such a person will not be content with anything other than to sacrifice his whole being for the sake of that goal, which surpasses one's own life. In the holy Qur'an, this kind of dedication is expressed in the following verse: '*The faithful are only those who have attained faith in God and His messenger and then have never doubted, and who wage jihad with their possessions and their persons in the way of God. It is they who are the truthful*' (49:15).

In the early years after the advent of the *bi'thah* (prophetic mission), Muslims suffered the most appalling torture and persecution in promoting this lofty goal. What had prevented the enemies of Islam to be inclined towards the affirmation of the religion of divine unity were such factors as the following: superstitious beliefs inherited from their ancestors; a desire to maintain the status of their idols; tribal antagonisms and rivalries; and the effort to maintain and entrench tribal glory, ethnic supremacy, and class privileges. These barriers were in the path of the spread of Islam in Mecca and its environs until Mecca was conquered by the Muslim forces.

The pressures that the Quraysh exerted on the Muslims caused some of the Muslims to emigrate to Abyssinia and others to Yathrib. Although the Prophet and ʿAlī enjoyed the protection of Abū Ṭālib and the clan of Banū Hāshim, Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib along with a group of Muslims nonetheless left for Abyssinia in the fifth year after the *biʿthah* and stayed there for two years.

In the tenth year after the *biʿthah*, Abū Ṭālib passed away. After a few days, Khadījah, the Prophet's noble wife who never ceased to devote her life and wealth in the promotion of the prophetic message, also departed from this world. As a result of the loss of these two great protectors, the intensity of the pressure on the Muslims increased to the point that in the thirteenth year after the *biʿthah*, the leaders of the Quraysh, in a general assembly, decided to stamp out the nascent religion of Islam, either by imprisoning, killing, or banishing the Prophet. These three plans have been mentioned in the Qur'an: '*When the faithless plotted against you to take you captive, or to kill or expel you. They plotted and God devised, and God is the best of devisers*' (8:30).

According to the final agreement of the leaders of the Quraysh, every clan was to nominate a strong and reliable young man, and, at a given moment after nightfall, all these chosen men together should fall upon the Prophet, each striking him a mortal blow. Through this plan, at the same time as putting a stop to the spread of Islam, the Prophet's blood would be on all the clans; thus, the clan of the Banū Hāshim would be unable to rise up against all the clans and take revenge for the blood of the Prophet. The angel Gabriel now came to the Prophet and told him that he should leave Mecca as soon as possible for Yathrib.

The appointed night arrived. Mecca was plunged in total darkness The men chosen to kill the Prophet had agreed to meet outside his door after nightfall. The Prophet had to exercise great vigilance to leave his home, while giving the impression he was still indoors, in his bed. To execute such a plan, a devotee was required to sleep in his bed, wrapping himself with the Prophet's green Ḥaḍramī cloak, so that the conspirators would think that the Prophet was still in the house. In this way, the attention of the enemies would remain focused on the house, rather than on the roads and pathways within and around Mecca. Who would be prepared to take the risk, to sacrifice his life and sleep in the Prophet's bed? This devotee had to be the one who had the greatest faith of all, who, from the very onset of the prophetic mission, was like the moth around a candle, circling it continuously. Such a devotee could be none other than 'Alī. It was upon him that the Prophet bestowed this great honour.

The Prophet turned to 'Alī and said: 'The disbelievers intend to assassinate me and have decided to attack my house altogether while I am asleep in my bed. So, I am commanded by God to leave Mecca. It is necessary that you sleep in my bed tonight, and cover yourself with my green cloak so that the enemies will think that I am still at home, in my bed.' 'Alī obeyed the prophetic command, and lay down in the Prophet's bed.

The forty assassins surrounded the house of the Prophet and from the crack of the door they watched the interior of the house. They had seen that the conditions of the house were normal and they had thought that the Prophet was resting in his bed. They were vigilant, maintaining surveillance of the house in such a way that even the movement of an ant was not hidden from their sight. One should take careful note how the Prophet, under such surveillance, left the house. According to many historians, the Prophet, while reciting verses 8 and 9 of Sūrah Yā-Sīn, passed through the circle of men, crossing their line without them realising. This narrative cannot be denied as the Divine could have ordained such an act so that the Prophet could be saved in this miraculous manner from the hands of his enemy. But it would appear that such a direct intervention of the Divine by a miracle was not destined; for if it had been, it would not have been necessary for 'Alī to sleep in the Prophet's bed, or for the Prophet himself to travel to the cave of Thawr and later, with great difficulty, to Medina.

Some assert that when the Prophet had left the house, his enemies had fallen asleep and the Prophet had taken advantage of this lapse in their vigilance. But this hypothesis is far-fetched. A logical person would never believe such a scenario, for how can one conceive of these men sleeping instead of performing their dastardly duty? But it is possible, as others have maintained, that the Prophet left the house before the gathering of the assassins.[1]

The Invasion of the House of Revelation

The agents of the Quraysh, their hands on the hilt of their swords, waited for the moment to attack the house of the Prophet and kill him as he slept in his bed. They were extremely jubilant, assuming that shortly they would attain their final goal. But ʿAlī, with certainty of heart and peace of mind, was lying down in the Prophet's bed, resting assured that God had rescued His beloved prophet.

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[1] Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 32.

The initial decision of the enemies was to attack the house of the Prophet at midnight. But for some reason, they changed their minds. A final agreement was made to enter the house at dawn to accomplish this mission. The dark curtain of night had lifted and dawn pierced the horizon. The chosen agents, with their swords, charged together, and entered the house of the Prophet. Eager to fulfil their hearts' desire, they were jubilant. But when they entered the Prophet's bedroom, and saw ʿAlī instead of the Prophet, astonishment and rage took hold of their souls. They turned to ʿAlī and asked him, 'Where is Muḥammad?' ʿAlī replied 'Why do you ask about him from me as if you had entrusted him to me?' In their anger they took hold of ʿAlī and dragged him towards the Sacred Precinct of the Kaʿbah. But after detaining him for a while, they had no choice but to free him. And while being choked with rage, they set about looking for the Prophet, deciding not to cease until they discovered his hiding place.[1]

In order to perpetuate for all times such a unique act of sacrifice, the Qur'an praises ʿAlī's devotion and acknowledges him as a person possessing a pure spirit of total sacrifice for the sake of the God's good pleasure: '*And among the people is he who gives his soul seeking the pleasure of God, and God is most kind to* [*His*] *servants*' (2:207).

The Criminal of the Umayyad Era

Many commentators believe that the above mentioned verse was revealed on the occasion of *laylat al-mabīt* (the night when the Prophet left his home) and that it was related in particular to ʿAlī's act of self-sacrifice.[2] Samurah ibn Jundub, a famous criminal of the Umayyad era, agreed to deny the true occasion of revelation (*sha'n al-nuzūl*) of the verse, for the reward of 400,000 dirhams. He made the declaration at a public meeting that it had been revealed in relation to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 97.

[2] See al-Balāghī, *Ālā' al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 184–185; Sayyid al-Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 1, pp. 206–207; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 262.

Muljam. In addition, not only did he deny that the revelation of this verse concerned ʿAlī, but also stated that another verse (describing a hypocrite) was revealed about ʿAlī.[1]

The aforesaid verse describing the hypocrite is: '*Among the people is he whose talk about worldly life impresses you, and he holds God witness to what is in his heart, though he is the staunchest of enemies*' (2:204).

Such distortion of the truth by a criminal like this is not unlikely. During the rule of Ziyād over Iraq, Samurah was in command of Basra and murdered 8,000 people who were followers of ʿAlī loyal to the Prophet's household. When Ziyād questioned Samurah's reasons for killing so many people, he replied 'I had no fear of killing twice that number!'[2] The scale of Samurah's transgressions and atrocities is unfathomable and we can hardly express it in these pages. The following examples of his behaviour will suffice for our purposes. He is the one who rejected the Prophet's orders to obtain permission of owners of a house prior to entering the property to inspect a palm tree. He had refused to sell his palm tree to the Prophet, although the price offered for the tree exceeded the market value. As he insisted on the right to inspect the palm tree without obtaining permission, the Prophet had told the owners of the house to go and uproot his tree and throw it away. He said Samurah: 'You are a harmful person [but in Islam] there should be no harm inflicted and none suffered.'

After some time, the Islamic scholars unveiled the mentioned distortion (*taḥrīf*), which had slightly affected the simple minded for a while, and removed all ambiguity from the reality of the situation. The traditionists and the commentators concurred that the true occasion of revelation of the aforementioned verse was the sacrifice of ʿAlī. This historical event has indicated that the people of Syria were greatly under the influence of the Umayyads, to the extent that their dictates were regarded as inscribed on a sacred scroll. That the people had accepted Samurah's words reveals they lacked the least knowledge in the field of Islamic history. They did not know the simple fact that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam had not been born at the time when this verse was revealed, neither had he met the Prophet, nor even set foot on the Hejaz.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 73.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, the events of 50 AH / 670 CE.

Inadmissible Prejudices

The devotion of Imam 'Alī that night when the house of the Prophet was under the surveillance of the assassins of Quraysh is not a matter that can be easily denied or overlooked. Referring to this devotion in the Qur'an (2:207), the Almighty has transformed this into a timeless event. Also, a number of the great commentators have mentioned that this verse was revealed on the occasion of 'Alī's selfless devotion to the Prophet. But some prejudiced scholars have tried to narrate and interpret this event in their own manner, according to their own interests, in order to obscure Imam 'Alī's devotion.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, a famous Sunni scholar, has written: 'Do not regard the sleeping of 'Alī in the Prophet's resting place as an act of devotion and a virtuous merit (*faḍīlah*) of 'Alī, because the Prophet had assured him that if he slept in his bed, no harm would come to him'.[1]

Ibn Taymiyyah al-Dimashqī[2] has added the following point: 'Alī knew that he would not be killed, since the Prophet had told him that he would announce to the people to come forth the following day, and at a specific place in Mecca, to collect their trusts left in the safety of Muḥammad; so 'Alī, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, was fully aware that such a mission from the Prophet would not place him in any danger. The safety of his life was fully guaranteed.

Response

Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Taymiyyah, and those who follow them, were known for their unkind attitude towards the Prophet's household. In the present instance, their effort to deny Imam 'Alī's merit has, however inadvertently, attributed even greater merit to him! Having received this mission from the Prophet, the status of 'Alī's faith – his readiness to sacrifice all for the Prophet on the night the latter departed from Mecca – can only be accounted for by one of two possibilities: either his belief in the truthfulness of the Prophet was derived from certain knowledge; or he had total and extraordinary faith in the sincerity of the words of the Prophet.

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[1] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-'Uthmāniyyah*, p. 45.

[2] Ibn Taymiyyah was imprisoned in Syria in the year 728 AH / 1328 CE for his heterodox ideas on intercession and pilgrimage; he remained in prison until his death.

As regards the first possibility, one cannot say that ʿAlī had absolutely certain knowledge that his safety and survival was guaranteed, and that this somehow detracts from his merit in performing this act of self-sacrifice, as is implied in the position of the aforementioned two scholars. For it is self-evident that those with a low degree of faith and belief never acquire firm certainty on the truthfulness of the Prophet's sayings; were they to take his place in his bed, they would doubtless experience many anxieties and worries.

If, however, one says that ʿAlī's faith was of such a high degree that his certitude of the truthfulness of the Prophet's words would enlighten his heart like sunlight, then one has confirmed that he indeed possessed an exalted degree of faith and virtue. For whenever the faith of an individual reaches the point that whatever he hears from the Prophet is as certain as the light of the sun, then such faith is unsurpassable. If, having been told by the Prophet that no harm would come to him if he pretended to be the Prophet, lying in his bed that night; and if, with a heart of utter certainty, that person did what he was commanded to do, without having the slightest inclination to fear or sense of danger, then such a person must properly be regarded as having a supreme degree of faith, devotion and virtue. This indeed is what we are confirming in regard to ʿAlī.

Now, it is necessary to turn the pages of history. So, far our discussion has been based on the hypothesis that the Prophet had told ʿAlī that he would not be killed, and we have seen that this is the basis on which the followers of Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Jāḥiẓ had formulated their interpretation of this event. However, not all historians have recorded history in the same manner as these two.

Kātib al-Wāqidī,[1] the author of *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, who exhaustively reports the events pertaining to the *hijrah*,[2] never mentions the aforementioned remark of al-Jāḥiẓ. Al-Maqrīzī,[3] a well-known historian of the ninth/fifteenth century, in his well-known work entitled *Imtāʿ al-Asmāʿ*, also refers to that event in the same manner as al-Wāqidī, and does not say that the Prophet assured ʿAlī of his safety. However, Ibn Hishām (*Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 483) and al-Ṭabarī (*Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 99) have referred to this as a saying of the Prophet and some other scholars such as Ibn Athīr (*Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 372) have followed these two sources.

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[1] Muḥammad ibn Saʿd known as al-Kātib al-Wāqidī (168–230 / 784–845). His *Ṭabaqāt* is one of the most authenticated and extensive sources on the biography (*sīrah*) of the Prophet.

[2] Al-Wāqidī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, pp. 227–228.

[3] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845 AH / 1441 CE).

Consequently, it cannot be ascertained whether the Prophet mentioned such a prediction or said them on the first night, as is claimed by some Shi'a and Sunni historians who quoted another version of this narration. The renowned Shi'a scholar, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in his *Amālī* writes: 'The night of the *hijrah* ended and 'Alī was aware of the Prophet's secret location; to provide the preliminary means for the Prophet's journey it was necessary to meet him at nightfall.'[1]

The Prophet stayed in the cave of Thawr for three nights. On one of the nights, 'Alī and Hind ibn Abī Hālah, Khadījah's son, went to the cave and were present with the Prophet who gave the following instructions to 'Alī...

> Firstly, arrange two camels for my travel companion and me. At this moment, Abū Bakr said: I have already obtained two camels for this purpose. The Prophet said: 'I will accept the two camels only on one condition: that I pay for both of them. He then ordered 'Alī to pay for the camels.
>
> Secondly, I am the trustee of the Quraysh. Right now, peoples' trusts are in my house. Tomorrow you must stand in a specified place in Mecca, and with a load voice make an announcement that whoever has a trust with Muḥammad should come forward and collect it.
>
> Third, after returning the trusts, you must prepare yourself for migration. Whenever you receive my letter, then bring with you my daughter Fāṭimah, your mother Fāṭimah, and Fāṭimah, daughter of Zubayr ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. So, if anyone from Banū Hāshim wishes to emigrate, then facilitate their migration for them. From now on, no harm which you might fear from them [the disbelievers] will befall you.

This statement resembles those to which reference is made in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* as well as in Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah*. So, if the Prophet had assured 'Alī of his safety, this occurred the following night, and not on the night of the *hijrah*; and if he had commanded 'Alī to return peoples' trusts it was on the second or third night and not on *laylat al-mabīt*.

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[1] *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, p. 237.

The way in which Sunni historians narrated this event, indicating that the Prophet had assured the Imam of his safety and had commanded him to return peoples' trusts on the very first night of the *hijrah*, is however understandable. For it is likely that their main purpose was to narrate the actual incident itself, and in this light, the importance of giving the exact dates and order of succession of the Prophet's commands, prediction and advice is diminished. According to al-Ḥalabī on one of the nights during which the Prophet remained in the cave of Thawr, Imam 'Alī attended to him. The Prophet instructed him to return to the people any outstanding debts.[1]

Referring to al-Suyūṭī's *Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Ḥalabī states that Imam 'Alī met the Prophet after the first night of the *hijrah*.[2]

Two Clear Proofs of Imam 'Alī's Self-Sacrifice

The two historical events testify that Imam 'Alī's offering to take the place of the Prophet, sleeping in his bed on the night the Prophet departed, was an act of pure sacrifice; 'Alī was truly prepared for martyrdom in the path of God.

1. The poems composed by Imam 'Alī describing the event provide a clear testimony of his courageous devotion and readiness to sacrifice himself. Al-Suyūṭī has cited them all in his exegesis.[3] The following suffices for our purposes here:

I made a shield out of my own soul for the best creature
who walked on the earth,

and who circumambulated the ancient house [of worship]
and the *ḥijr* [of Ishmael];

[for] Muḥammad, when he feared that they would plot against him;

But my Lord rescued him from the plot;

I slept the night in his bed in vigilant anticipation of them,
when they attacked me,

Preparing my soul to be killed or captured.

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[1] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, pp. 36, 37.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 3, p. 180.

2. Sunni and Shi'a scholars alike have cited a saying in which God Almighty called two of His archangels, Gabriel and Michael, and said to them: 'If I were to ordain for one of you death and for the other life, which of you is prepared to accept death and to offer life to the other?' At this point, neither was able to accept death and to be sacrificed for the sake of the other. Then God commanded the two archangels: 'Descend to the earth and see how 'Alī has purchased death, preparing himself to be sacrificed for the Prophet; go and protect him from the evil of his enemies.'[1]

If the passage of time has veiled, for some, this act of supreme virtue and merit (*faḍīlah*), in the early days of Islam, this act of 'Alī was counted by all, friend and foe alike, as being one of ultimate self-sacrifice. When the caliph 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb established the *shūrā* (council) of six companions to determine who should succeed him, Imam 'Alī, addressed the members of the council with the following argument: 'I adjure you by God: tell me, was it anyone but me who took food for the Prophet in the cave [of Ḥirā']? Or was it anyone but me who slept in his bed and made of himself a shield for him?' All replied: 'Truly, it was none but you'.[2]

Ibn Ṭāwūs has provided a remarkable analysis of Imam 'Alī's self-sacrifice. Comparing this act with that of Ishmael – who surrendered himself to the will of his father, Abraham – he affirms that 'Alī's sacrifice was the greater of the two.[3]

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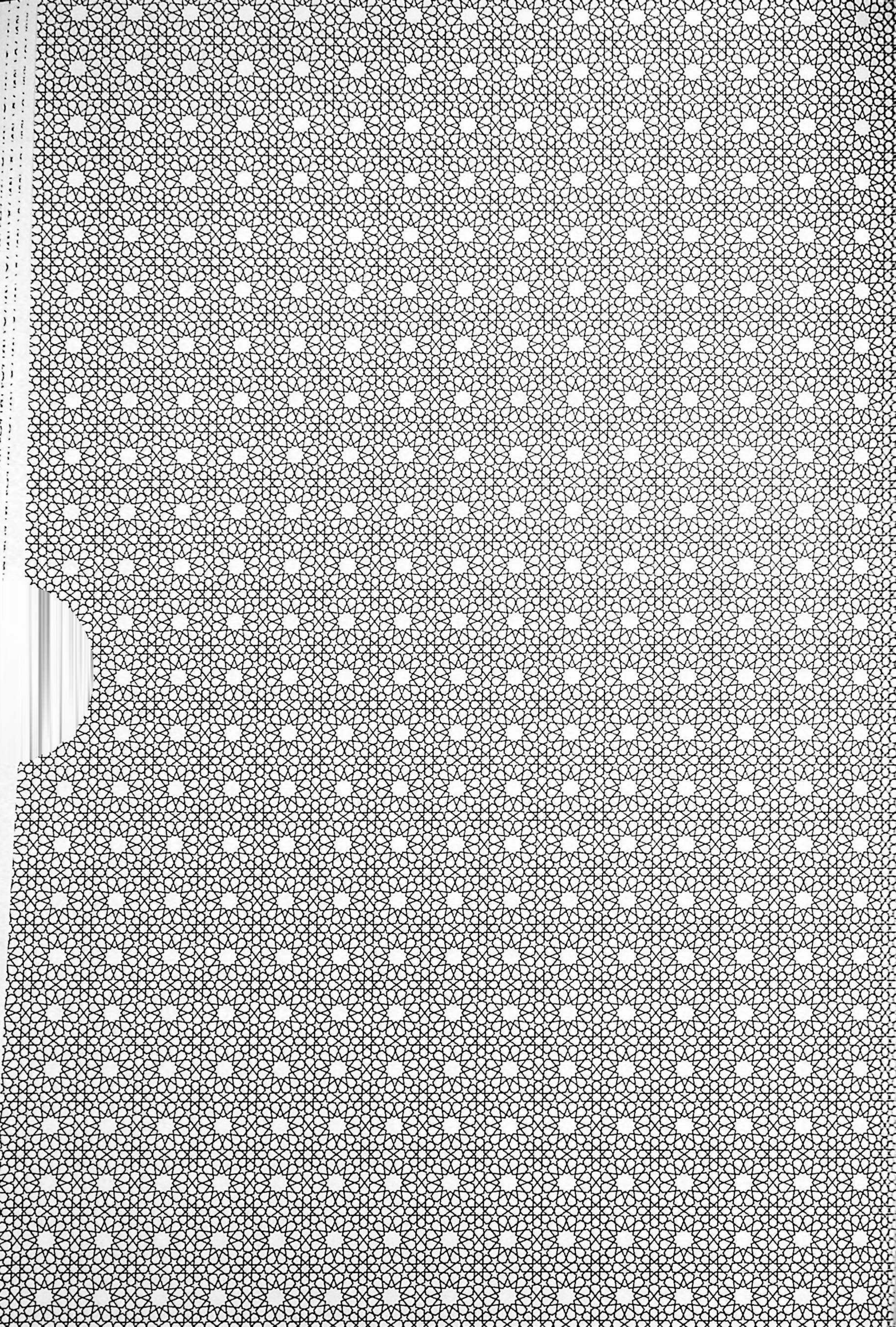
[1] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 19, p. 39, quoting from Ghazzālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

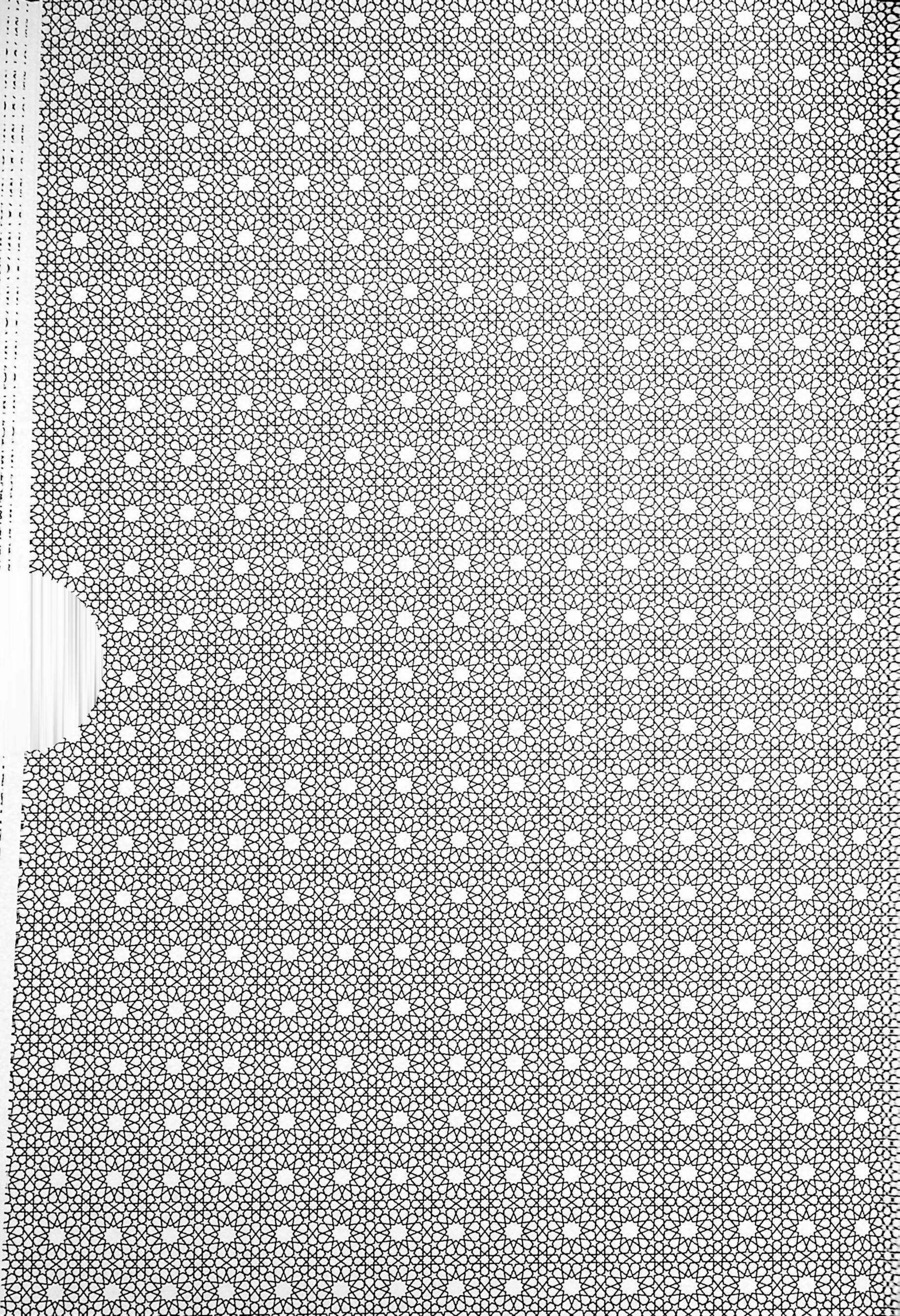
[2] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 123; al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj*, p. 74.

[3] See Iqbāl, p. 593; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 19, p. 98.



Part 3

The Life of Imam ʿAlī after the Hijrah and before the Prophet's Death



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An Outline of the Period

The third period of Imam ʿAlī's life begins with the Prophet's migration (*hijrah*) to Medina. This period was woven of a series of golden threads, a remarkable sequence of striking events. These can be summed up under the following two headings: his achievements in the wars of early Islam and his accomplishment as a scribe of the revelation of the Qur'an.

1. Concerning his devotion and sacrifice in the field of warfare

The venerable Prophet of Islam during his life in Medina waged twenty-seven battles (*ghazawāt*; sing., *ghazwah*) against the disbelievers, the Jews, and the rebels. According to the terminology of Muslim historians and biographers, a *ghazwah* was a battle waged under the leadership of the Prophet, who personally accompanied the army and returned with them to Medina. In addition to these twenty-seven *ghazawāt*, fifty-five battles known as *sariyyāt* also took place according to the Prophet's order.[1] This type of battle is one in which a section of the Muslim army was mobilised and sent from Medina to fight the rebels and the conspirators, the commander of which was appointed by the Prophet as his deputy.

Imam ʿAlī took part in all *ghazawāt* except for one, the Battle of Tabūk, during which he remained in Medina, according to the instruction of the Prophet, for it was feared that during the absence of the Prophet, a rebellion might be instigated by the hypocrites in an effort to take over the heartland of Islam, the city of Medina.

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[1] Al-Wāqidī (*al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 2) mentions that the number of *sariyyāt* is less.

The number of *sariyyāt* led by the Imam is not clear but details of some of the most significant of them will be narrated in the following chapters.

2. Inscribing and recording the Book of Revelation (the Qur'an)

Among the most sensitive and honourable tasks entrusted to the Imam were the following: the inscription of the verses of the revelation of the Qur'an, the composing of many historical and political documents, and the writing of letters of invitation to Islam. During the Prophet's life, 'Alī had carefully recorded all the Qur'anic verses, those revealed both in Mecca and in Medina. Therefore, it is altogether appropriate that he is regarded as one of the most important scribes of the revelation, and also an outstanding memoriser (*ḥāfiẓ*) of the Qur'an (i.e. one who knows the Qur'an by heart). Also, given his composition of many important documents of a political and historical nature, as well as the letters of invitation – many of the texts of which can today be read in various historical and biographical sources – one can indeed assert that 'Alī was in fact the first scribe of Islam. Even the peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, dictated by the Prophet, was written by him.

The intellectual services of Imam 'Alī were not limited to the above mentioned functions; with great effort he endeavoured to record the Prophet's traditions, including his sayings, deeds and manners, visions and revelations, as well as prescribed legal rulings and injunctions. As a result, Imam 'Alī succeeded in compiling these precious records in a collection of six volumes. After his martyrdom, this collection remained with his descendants (the Shi'a imams), as invaluable treasures. After the death of the Imam, those spiritual leaders who followed him were able to use these works as major sources for establishing various points of principle in their disputations with others. Zurārah, an outstanding disciple of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, had studied some of the volumes of this collection with Imam al-Ṣādiq, and has given an account of some of their particular features.[1]

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[1] See Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* (Najaf edition.), vol. 2, p. 209; al-Najāshī, *Fihrist* (Indian edition), p. 255. Regarding these six books, see the summary given also in the author's introduction to *Barrisī-yi Musnad-i Aḥmad.*

The Specific Character of Imam ʿAlī's migration

After the migration of the Prophet, Imam ʿAlī waited for the Prophet's letter. It was not long before Abū Wāqid al-Laythī delivered that letter to him in Mecca. The content of the letter was the acknowledgement of what the Prophet had verbally commanded ʿAlī to do on the third night of his stay in the cave of Thawr, to travel with the ladies of the Prophet's household, and to offer assistance to those Muslims who wished to migrate but were limited in means.

The Imam had carefully executed the Prophet's instructions regarding people's trusts. Consequently, there was no other work involved except preparing his and his relative's provisions for the journey to Medina. Hence, he sent a message to those groups among the Muslims who were ready to migrate: they were to leave Mecca in secrecy and at a distance of a few kilometres from the city, they should stop at a place called Dhū Ṭuwā, and to wait until the Imam's caravan reached them. Although ʿAlī sent such a message to them, he himself prepared for the journey in bright daylight, and, with the assistance of Ayman, son of Umm Ayman, helped the ladies to sit in the camel-litter, and told Abū Wāqid: 'Ride the camels slowly, because the ladies do not have the capacity to bear fast riding.'

Ibn Shahr Āshūb writes:

> ʿAbbās was aware of ʿAlī's decision to depart from Mecca in daylight, right in front of the watchful eyes of the enemies, and that the ladies would accompany him too. Therefore, he hurriedly went to ʿAlī and said: 'Muḥammad left Mecca in secrecy and the Quraysh searched every corner of Mecca and surroundings in order to try and find him, how is it that you and this large family are leaving Mecca, in full view of the watchful eyes of the enemies? Do you not know that they would stop you from leaving?' In reply to his uncle, ʿAlī said: 'The night I met the Prophet in the cave, he ordered that I must emigrate from Mecca with the ladies of Banū Hāshim, informing me that from that moment onwards, no harm would come to me. I have confidence in my Lord as well as in Aḥmad's promise, and his path is the same as mine. Hence, in daylight and in full view of the watchful eyes of the Quraysh, I will leave Mecca!'

Then he composed spontaneously these verses, the content of which is contained in the sentence quoted above:

Truly the son of Āminah, the Prophet Muḥammad
is a truthful man, speaking on the authority of Gabriel
take up the responsibility and fear not any miscreant,
For God will deal with them…
As for me, I trust in my Lord and in Aḥmad,
his path is joined to mine.

Not only did he reply to his uncle in this manner, but also, when Abū Wāqid al-Laythī, who was in charge of the camels, was trying to speed up the caravans to escape from the piercing looks, cast like arrows, from the eyes of the Quraysh, ʿAlī stopped him from trying to make haste, and said: 'The Prophet informed me that no harm would come to us on this path.' From then on, he took control of the reins of the camels himself and recited the words:

None but God [has power over affairs] so remove your misgiving;
God will suffice you in regard to all of that which causes you concern.[1]

The Quraysh in Pursuit of ʿAlī

ʿAlī and his companions were about to reach the land of Ḍajnān, when seven masked horsemen from the distance were seen riding fast towards the caravan. To prevent the women from having to experience any unpleasant incident, ʿAlī ordered Abū Wāqid and Ayman to make the camels sit and hobble them immediately. Then they helped the ladies to dismount. The masked horsemen with their unsheathed swords arrived, their throats were choked with rage, and with angry voices shouted: 'Do you believe you and these women can escape from our clutches? Indeed not, you must turn back!' ʿAlī said: 'If I do not return, what will happen?' They said: 'We will force you to return, or we will return with your head!'

After these angry words they turned to the camels to frighten them. At that moment, ʿAlī, with his sword unsheathed, stopped them from advancing. One of them thrust with his sword at ʿAlī. The sword thrust was deflected by ʿAlī, who then charged on them with force, slashing with his sword at one of the group of assailants, whose name was Jināḥ. The sword was about to pierce his shoulder, when suddenly his horse jerked backwards and ʿAlī's sword cleaved instead into the back of his horse. Then ʿAlī shouted at them: 'I am determined to go to Medina and I have no other aim except to join the Prophet. Anyone who wants me to cut him into pieces and shed his blood, let him come forward to fight, or just come close to me.' After issuing this challenge, he ordered Ayman and Abū Wāqid to rise, unfasten the legs of their camels and continue with their journey. The enemies realised that ʿAlī was prepared to fight to the death, and they had just seen that one of their number had nearly lost his life already, so they changed their minds and decided to return, taking the road back to Mecca. ʿAlī and his caravan continued with the journey to Medina. Near Mount Ḍajnān, they rested for a whole day and night until they were joined by the others who had decided to migrate. One of the people who joined ʿAlī was Umm Ayman, a pious lady who was never separated from the family of the Prophet to the end of her days.

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[1] Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, p. 299; *Biḥār*, vol. 19, p. 65.

Historical sources record that ʿAlī walked on foot throughout the journey, while constantly invoking the name of God, and performing the prescribed prayers with his fellow travellers.

Some commentators of the Qur'an[1] believe that the following verse was revealed on account of the perseverance of these people: 'T*hose who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth* [*and say*], *"Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the hellfire"*' (3:191).

After arriving in Medina, ʿAlī and his companions were received by the Prophet. When the Prophet saw ʿAlī, his eye fell upon ʿAlī's swollen feet from which drops of blood were dripping. The Prophet embraced him, tears of affection welling up in his eyes.[2]

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[1] See for example, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, pp. 301–303.

[2] *Aʿlām al-Warā*, p. 192; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 75.

2

Two Great Honours

If we doubt every issue concerning social questions, or require for their response strongly corroborating evidence or some proof or some testimony, we can never entertain doubt about the necessity of unity and cooperation within society, nor of the enormous benefits that are derived from such unity and cooperation. Thus, one can never find a person who would claim dispersion and division among people is beneficial, while unity and cooperation is harmful. For among the least advantage acquired by society from such alliance and cooperation is that small and scattered forces are brought together and the result is the appearance of a mighty force, one which can result in the total transformation of a whole range of social affairs.

The water that is collected behind great dams takes the form of lakes which are created from narrow streams which, on their own, can neither produce electric power nor can they be utilised in irrigation. But from the joining of these tiny streams in one place, a lake is formed, and the resulting power can produce thousands of kilowatts of electricity, and with its water thousands of acres of land can be cultivated.

The aim of society and community is the integration of forces,
for drops which are brought together become a sea.
From a sole drop nothing comes, except as part of the sea,
whatever benefit you can imagine, it is there.
From a drop, no fish will ever appear,
becoming part of the sea, a whale will arise.

No bread can be baked from a grain of wheat, no daily bread gained,
but with bushels and sacks of wheat, prosperous times return.
From one person here and there, it is impossible to do great things,
but from the community can be sought whatever you need.
Indeed, because ants have held hands and come together,
in the words of the Shaykh, the ferocious lion is enslaved and overcome.

For the advancement of goals, not only is material strength required, but also the individual's power of intellect and his spirituality is essential for the correct organisation of social forces and the alleviation of social problems. The method of mutual consultation (*shūrā*) and a proper exchange of opinions will show the right path to traverse and overcome mountains of difficulties. Therefore, in accordance with the precious teachings of Islam, the necessity of consultation and negotiation regarding social issues has been clearly indicated. The Qur'an regards those who conduct their affairs on the basis of consultation and discourse as fair seekers of the truth: '*Those who answer their Lord, maintain the prescribed prayer, and their affairs are by counsel among themselves, and they spend out of what We have provided them with*' (42:38).

Unity and the Bond of Brotherhood

Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) is a crucial social principle in the religion of Islam. The Prophet of Islam made great and diverse endeavours for the sake of consolidating this bond of brotherhood.

After the arrival of the Migrants (Muhājirīn) in Medina, the bond of brotherhood between the two tribes of the Helpers (Anṣār) in Medina, namely the Aws and the Khazraj, was for the first time tied by the hands of the Prophet. These tribes had been continuously in conflict with each other but after the efforts made on their behalf by the Prophet, they became brothers and solemnly agreed to put behind them all previous conflict and tension. The purpose of this alliance between the two aforementioned tribes was to establish the unity of these two major armed forces of Islam to better confront the disbelievers. It was imperative that the previous animosity, killing, injustice, and oppression be forgotten; it was vital that peace take the place of age-old hostility.

Then, for a second time, the Prophet ordered his companions to become brothers, this time the pact of brotherhood was to be established between the Migrants and the Helpers, each was to choose for himself a brother. It was allowed for either two migrants to become brothers to each other or for one migrant to enter a pact of brotherhood with one helper. In this way, a kind of power – at once political and spiritual – was brought into being.

Muslim historians and traditionists write that one day the Prophet stood up and addressed his companions, saying: 'For the sake of God become brothers, two by two.'

The sources mention in this connection some of the companions who, under the order of the Prophet, entered into such a bond: Abū Bakr with 'Umar, 'Uthmān with 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf, Ṭalḥah with Zubayr, Ubayy ibn Ka'b with Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ammār with Abū Ḥudhayfah, Salmān with Abū al-Dardā' and so forth; all entered into the bond approved by the Prophet. Such a bond of brotherhood, which occurred among the companions, is distinct from the universal Islamic brotherhood declared by the Qur'an, through which all of the believers are regarded as brothers.

'Alī is the Brother of the Prophet Muḥammad

In the mosque of the Prophet in Medina, the Prophet appointed a brother for every person who was present there, but 'Alī was left alone, no brother was chosen for him. At that moment, his eyes filled with tears, he approached the Prophet and said: 'For every one of your companions, you appointed a brother, but you did not choose anyone to enter into the pact of brotherhood with me!' At that time, the Prophet made a historical declaration, manifesting 'Alī's eminent rank and sublime station in spiritual proximity to the Prophet: 'You are my brother in this world and in the hereafter. By Him who raised me up as a prophet with the Truth, I only postponed this in order to appoint you as my own brother. You are my brother in this world and in the hereafter.'[1]

This declaration is a clear manifestation of 'Alī's status in relation to the Prophet, in regard to spirituality, purity, and devotion in all matters concerned with religious aspiration. Among the Sunni scholars, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, the author of *Riyāḍ al-Naḍirah* acknowledges this reality.[1]

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 14; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Istī'āb*, vol. 3, p. 35.

From this point of view it is possible to more fully appreciate the basis of the interpretation given to the famous verse of the *mubāhalah* (Qur'an 3:61), the mutual imprecation with which the Prophet was commanded to challenge the Christians of Najrān when they came to dispute with him about religion. The verse reads as follows: '*Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, "Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down God's curse upon the liars"*' (3:61). The majority of the commentators agree that the words of this verse of the Qur'an, 'and ourselves', refer to the Prophet and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib together; thus, the Qur'an regards 'Alī as the very 'soul' of the Prophet. Sometimes two persons, alike in thought and soul, not only attract each other but in fact are unified in spirit and manifest but a single personality.

It is an undeniable fact that every being attracts its like and repels its opposite. This principle is not limited to natural substances on earth and in the heavens, but extends also to the great personages of the world, who also manifest the properties of attraction and repulsion. Some groups of people are attracted to them and others are repelled by them. This type of polarisation is determined by spiritual affinity or contradiction. It is on the basis of this principle that some souls brought together and others are dispersed. This principle is referred to in Islamic philosophy as 'affinity is the cause of integration' (*al-sinkhiyyah 'illat al-inḍimām*).

Another Honour for Imam 'Alī

After the construction of the Prophet's mosque, the companions of the Prophet built their houses around the mosque, with one of their doors opening onto it. God ordered the Prophet that all the doors which thus opened onto the mosque must be closed, with one exception: that of the house of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. This order weighed heavily for some of the companions; consequently the Prophet addressed them from the pulpit, with the following words: 'God Almighty commanded unto that all the doors which opened onto the mosque must be closed except the door of

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[1] Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, *Riyāḍ al-Naḍirah*, vol. 2, p. 16.

'Alī's house. I never make orders myself that doors must be closed or be kept open. In such matters I follow the command of God.'[1]

On that day all the Prophet's companions accepted this as a great distinction and honour for 'Alī, to the extent that the second caliph, in later times, was to exclaim: 'Alas, if only three honours which were granted to 'Alī, could have been bestowed upon me.' He then referred to these three honours:

(a) the Prophet offered the hand of his daughter in marriage to 'Alī;

(b) all the doors which opened onto the Prophet's mosque were closed except the door of 'Alī's house;

(c) in the Battle of Khaybar, the Prophet handed the standard to 'Alī.[2]

The difference between 'Alī and all others was that his connection with the mosque never ceased. He was a child of the House of God, for he was born in the Ka'bah; as a result, the mosque was his home from the first day of his life, and such an honourable and auspicious start to life was not bestowed upon anyone else. In addition to this, 'Alī ceaselessly and in all circumstances preserved the majesty of the mosque with great reverence, while others were less able to maintain such reverence.

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[1] See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 369; Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 125; al-Ṭabarī, *Riyāḍ al-Naḍirah*, vol. 3, p. 192.

[2] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 26.

3

The Unrivalled Victor in the Battle of Badr

The blood-curdling cries of a man named Ḍamḍam pierced the heart of the Quraysh; beside him was a camel with cut ears and a split nose, and an overturned saddle. Such a scene drew the attention of the Quraysh. With the front and back of his shirt torn apart, standing behind a camel with blood pouring from its ears and nose, he cried out: 'O people! The camels carrying the bags of musk are in danger of being taken by Muḥammad and his companions. They want to attack the caravan at Badr. Hurry, rescue them!'

He carried on repeating his lamentations and his cries for aid. This provoked the young men of the Quraysh to leave their homes, and their place of their work and their various affairs and to gather around him. The pitiable state of the camel and the deplorable lamentations of Ḍamḍam lifted from them their reason and the rein of affairs fell in the hands of the emotions. Most of the people decided to leave the city of Mecca for the wells of Badr in order to rescue the caravan of the Quraysh.

The Prophet's magnanimity of course surpassed any possible desire for other people's wealth and property; he would never try and appropriate without due reason the possessions of anyone else. So, what could have been the cause for such a decision? The Prophet's action was based on two motivations. Firstly, it was necessary to make the Quraysh realise that their trade routes were under the control of the forces of Islam. Therefore, if the Quraysh were to deprive Muslims of freedom of speech or prevent the open and unhindered preaching of Islam, their jugular vein – the trade route – would be severed. For no matter how eloquent, powerful, sincere, and persevering the speaker may be, without freedom of speech he will not be able to perform his religious duty of spreading the message of Islam. In the atmosphere of Mecca, the Quraysh and their persecution of the Muslims constituted the biggest obstacle for the spread of Islam and for the establishment of the people's awareness of the religion of *tawḥīd*. All the tribes were permitted to enter Mecca during the hajj rituals, except the Prophet and his companions. He was totally forbidden from entering Mecca and its surrounding areas. They would have killed him if he ever tried to enter Mecca. It was during the period of the hajj that people flocked to Mecca from all corners of the Hejaz; this was the best time for the Prophet to preach the noble and pure religion of Islam.

Secondly, the Quraysh constantly persecuted and tortured a group of Muslims, who for one reason or another, were unable to leave Mecca for Medina. Some of the Migrants who had managed to leave Mecca, but were unable to transfer their wealth, were also threatened by the Quraysh. The action proposed by the Prophet – appropriating the goods from the caravan of the Quraysh – was intended to teach a lesson to those who deprived Muslims of all types of freedom, and who in addition were guilty of constant persecution of the Muslims and of unscrupulous confiscation of their property.

Therefore, it was with these two motivations that the Prophet departed from Medina in Ramaḍān 2 / March 624, with 313 persons, intending to appropriate the belongings and the goods from the caravan of the Quraysh. He halted next to the wells of Badr. The caravan of the traders of Quraysh was returning from Syria en route to Mecca. They had to pass the village of Badr. Abū Sufyān was aware of the Prophet's decision. He informed the leaders of the Quraysh by means of Ḍamḍam, who was hired to enact the scene described above. His heart-rending cries galvanised the warriors and zealots of Quraysh into action; they rushed headlong to fight the Muslims in order to rescue their threatened caravan.

The army of the Quraysh consisted of nine hundred battle-hardened warriors; equipped with the latest weaponry, they moved towards the wells of Badr. Although before arrival, they were informed by Abū Sufyān's scout that the caravan had changed its direction, and had taken an alternative route to avoid the Muslim troops, the Quraysh army still continued on its way in order to nip the nascent religion of Islam in the bud. Early in the morning of 17 Ramaḍān 2 / 11 March 624, they descended from the hillsides of the plain of Badr.

The Muslim army was positioned at the northern passage of the plain of Badr, on 'the nearer side' (referred to in a verse of Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:42, as *al-'udwat al-dunyā*), awaiting the arrival of the caravan of the Quraysh. Then they heard that the army of the Quraysh had set out for Badr to defend their caravan, and that they had positioned their troops on 'the farther side' (*al-'udwat al-quṣwā*; Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:42).

The alliance between the Prophet and the Helpers was a defensive one. The Helpers made an oath of allegiance with the Prophet in 'Aqabah, that whenever an enemy advanced towards Medina, the Prophet's life would be defended. However, there was no condition in the pact that pertained to waging war against his enemy outside Medina. Consequently, the Prophet, in a military consultative assembly consisting of a group of young men among the Helpers and group of the Migrants, called for a general consultation. The expression of their opinions was contradictory: on the one was bravery and chivalry, on the other, weakness and cowardice. At first Abū Bakr stood up and said: 'The great and courageous men of the Quraysh have participated in this military mobilisation. They have never had faith in any true religion, and they have never suffered even for a moment any degradation or humiliation. We, however, have never left our homes fully prepared for battle.'[1] The implication here was that it was advisable to turn away from this path and return to Medina.

The second speaker was 'Umar. He confirmed his friend's point of view. Then Miqdād stood up and made the following remark: 'I swear by God, we are not like the Children of Israel, who said to Moses: "O Moses, you and your Lord go and fight the battle, we will sit here." We say the very opposite: "You go and fight the battle under the shade of the Grace of your Lord, and we will fight alongside you, under your protection."'

Al-Ṭabarī writes: 'Before Miqdād got up to speak, the Prophet's face was red with anger [on account of what the two previous speakers had said] but when Miqdād uttered the good news of offering help, the Prophet's face became radiant.'[2]

The next person to speak was Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh: 'If you were to place your foot on this sea [pointing to the Red Sea] we will also follow you. Whatever place you see fit to go, we shall follow you there.' At this, the Prophet's face lit up with joy, and he said, in the manner of one who was bringing good tidings, he said: 'I can see the annihilation of the Quraysh'. Following this prediction, the army of Islam, under the Prophet's command, marched forth until they reached a point near the wells of Badr, and it was here that they took up their position.

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[1] Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 48.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 140, quoting from 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd.

Concealing the Truth

A number of historians, like al-Ṭabarī and al-Maqrīzī, attempted to veil the truth out of prejudice, and thus were not prepared to narrate the actual dialogue between the '*shaykhayn*' (the 'two shaykhs', that is, Abū Bakr and 'Umar) and the Prophet, as described by al-Wāqidī in his *Maghāzī*. On the contrary, they narrated that Abū Bakr got up and spoke well; and then 'Umar got up and also spoke well!

One must ask from these two distinguished historians that if both had spoken well in that consultative assembly, why were the details of their statements not revealed, while the statements of Miqdād and Sa'd were quoted in great detail; and also, if they had spoken well, then why had the Prophet's face become darkened with displeasure, as mentioned by al-Ṭabarī himself?

The Forces of Truth against the Forces of Falsehood

The armies of the Muslims and the Quraysh were ranged opposite one another. A number of minor skirmishes ignited the flames of full-scale war. Three eminent members of Quraysh, named 'Utbah, father of Hind (the wife of Abū Sufyān), 'Utbah's elder brother, Shaybah, and Walīd, son of 'Utbah, came forward with deafening war-cries, entering with confidence into the centre of the battlefield. 'Utbah issued the challenge for single combat. At first, three courageous warriors among the Helpers accepted the challenge and put themselves forward. But the snobbery of the Quraysh refrained from fighting them and shouted: 'O Muḥammad, send forth against us our peers from our own tribe'. The Prophet turned to three of his relatives, 'Ubaydah ibn Ḥārith ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Ḥamzah, and 'Alī and ordered them to rise and accept the challenge of the enemy. These high-ranking, valiant companions of Islam approached the battlefield with veiled faces. They introduced themselves and 'Utbah accepted all three of them as worthy opponents for single combat. He said: 'All three are our peers'.

At this point, some historians like al-Wāqidī give the following report. When the three courageous warriors among the Helpers prepared to go to the battlefield, the Prophet himself stopped them, and he did not want them to participate in this, the first battle of Islam. Also, he made everyone aware that Islam, the religion of *tawḥīd*, was so precious in his view, that he was ready to send forth the nearest and dearest members of his own family against the enemy. It was for this reason that he turned to the Banū Hāshim and said: 'Arise and fight against the army of falsehood (*bāṭil*), they want to extinguish the divine light.'[1]

It has also been reported that in this battle each of the warriors advanced towards a warrior of the same age: the youngest was 'Alī, and he faced Walīd (uncle of Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān); the middle-aged Ḥamzah faced 'Utbah (the maternal grandfather of Mu'āwiyah); and 'Ubaydah, the oldest of them, faced Shaybah. In contrast to this report, however, Ibn Hishām has reported that Shaybah faced Ḥamzah and 'Utbah faced 'Ubaydah.[2] Now let us investigate which one of these reports is the most plausible. Taking the following two points into account can help resolve the issue and bring the truth to light. Firstly, according to a number of historians, 'Alī and Ḥamzah's challengers were soon lying dead on the ground, but the combat between 'Ubaydah and his challenger continued, with none achieving outright victory. It is reported that 'Alī and Ḥamzah, after killing their challengers managed to come to the aid of 'Ubaydah and killed his challenger. Secondly, in his letter to Mu'āwiyah, Imam 'Alī reminds him that: 'I have with me the very sword with which, in man-to-man combat, I struck your grandfather ['Utbah, father of Hind the mother of Mu'āwiyah], your maternal uncle [Walīd, the son of 'Utbah], and your brother [Ḥanẓalah].'[3] The implication here was that, even then, he was still armed with the same power as when he fought against the relatives of Mu'āwiyah.

In another place, he wrote: 'O Mu'āwiyah! Do you challenge me with your sword? You recognise where my sword struck the bodies of your brother, uncle, and grandfather – and that is not far from the oppressors.'[4]

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[1] Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 62.

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 625.

[3] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 64.

[4] Ibid.

From these two letters one can deduce that ʿAlī participated in the killing of Muʿāwiyah's grandfather. On the other hand, we know that Ḥamzah and ʿAlī's challengers were soon lying dead on the ground. If Ḥamzah faced ʿUtbah (Muʿāwiyah's grandfather) then ʿAlī could not write to Muʿāwiyah that the latter's grandfather lay dead on the ground by the strike of his sword; consequently, one may assume that Shaybah faced Ḥamzah and ʿUtbah faced ʿUbaydah: thus, Ḥamzah and ʿAlī, after taking the lives of their challengers, turned their swords on ʿUtbah to give him the death blow.

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ʿAlī, Son-in-law of the Prophet

In accordance with the divine command, and in keeping with the noble tradition of Islam, ʿAlī decided in the prime of his youth to anchor the ship of his life in peace and tranquillity through an appropriate marriage. But such a personality could never select a spouse simply for the sake of satisfying a transient need or out of wholly relative desires, thus restricting the horizons of his spiritual life. Consequently, he requested a consort akin to himself as regards the fundamental criteria of faith, piety, wisdom, and nobility, and in every respect to be like him. Such a wife could be no one but Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, of whose character and special gifts ʿAlī was fully aware, from her birth to that time.

Proposals of Marriage to Fāṭimah

Before ʿAlī's proposal, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar had also requested to enter into marriage with Fāṭimah. Both heard the same reply from the Prophet: he was to wait for a divine command regarding Fāṭimah's marriage. The two lost hope of marrying Fāṭimah and entered into dialogue with Saʿd ibn Muʿādh, chief of the Aws tribe. They realised that, apart from ʿAlī, no one was worthy of marrying Fāṭimah, and the Prophet was also of the same opinion. For this reason, all of them began to look for ʿAlī. Finally they found him with his camel, in a garden of one of the Helpers, engaged in watering the palm trees. They came to ʿAlī and told him: 'The dignitaries of the Quraysh have forwarded their marriage proposal for the Prophet's daughter, but the Prophet answered that Fāṭimah's marriage depends on divine command; we hope that if you, given your precedence in Islam, and your distinctions, propose to Fāṭimah, you might receive a positive response; and if your means are insufficient, we are ready to assist you. '

'Alī's eyes filled up with tears of delight. He said: 'The daughter of the Prophet is what I wish and desire.' After uttering these words, he went to the Prophet, who at that time was residing at Umm Salamah's house; when he knocked on the door, Muḥammad called Umm Salamah, saying: 'Arise and open the door, this is the person whom God and His prophet love'.

It is recorded that Umm Salamah said:

> The Prophet's praise of this person impressed upon me such a great desire to see who he was, that when I got up and opened the door, I was on the verge of falling over. I opened the door and 'Alī entered and sat with the Prophet. But the grandeur and dignity of the Prophet's presence overawed him, preventing him from speaking. So, with his head bowed, silence governed the situation. Then, the Prophet broke the silence and said: 'It seems that you have come for a particular purpose'. 'Alī in reply said: 'My kinship with the household of the Prophet, my steadfastness and firmness on the path of religion and my ardent endeavour for the spread of Islam is evident to you.' The Prophet said: 'Your status is far higher than that which you have just described.' 'Alī then said: 'Do you think it is appropriate that I marry Fāṭimah?'[1]

In his marriage proposal, 'Alī placed stress upon his piety and his glittering record in Islam. In this manner, he teaches everyone that these qualities are the essential criteria for a marriage partner, rather than wealth, beauty, and social status. The Prophet employed the principle of the freedom of a woman to choose her husband; in reply to 'Alī's proposal he said: 'Before you, other persons have proposed to my daughter, and I consulted her regarding their proposals, but I saw extreme reluctance in her expression. Now I will convey your proposal to her, and I will let you know her reply.'

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[1] As regards the manner of his proposal, 'Alī follows a fundamental traditional principle. Despite being struck by awe in the presence of the Prophet, he proceeded, without any intermediary, to make the proposal in person, an act which displays at one and the same time a courageous and pure spirit.

The Prophet proceeded to Fāṭimah's house; when he arrived at her door, she rose and took the cloak from his shoulders, removed his sandals, washed his holy feet and then she made an ablution and sat with dignity in his presence. The Prophet began speaking to his beloved daughter with these words: "Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is one whose merit, distinction, and status in Islam is evident to all of us. I had prayed to God to wed you to the best of His creatures. Now, 'Alī has come to me and asked for your hand in marriage. What do you say about this?'

At that moment Fāṭimah entered into a deep silence, but did not turn her gaze from the Prophet. Her face did not show the slightest inclination of disapproval. The Prophet rose up and said: 'God is Greatest! (*Allāhu akbar!*); my daughter's silence is the sign of her approval.'[1]

Ethical, Intellectual, and Spiritual Affinity

It is true that in Islam every Muslim man is in a position of equal status with every other Muslim, and every Muslim woman wedded with a Muslim man has made a marital contract with the person of the same status. However, if we consider the spiritual and intellectual aspects of each individual, it is undeniable that many women are not of the same status as many men, and vice versa. Those noble Muslim men who are intent on the pursuit of excellence in terms of human qualities, ethical disposition, and spiritual wisdom must try to enter into marriage with women of the same aspirations, stature, and orientation. For women of deep piety it is likewise such spiritual, intellectual, and ethical principles that dominate their inclinations, and these will form the criteria of their choice of marriage. The main purpose of marriage is to establish peace of mind and serenity of soul throughout the span of one's life; and without observing these basic principles, harmony in marriage is unattainable. Likewise, without the whole of one's marital relationship being governed by a fundamental affinity in the domains of ethical sensibility, spiritual aspiration, and psychological orientation, any marriage will lack stability.

In this light, the truth of the following saying of God addressed to the Prophet can be more clearly perceived: 'Had I not created 'Alī, there would never have been a match on earth for your daughter Fāṭimah.'[2] It is obvious that such a matching expresses nothing other than a fundamental affinity of spiritual substance.

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[1] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 50.

[2] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 43, p. 9.

The Expenses for the Marriage and Wedding Celebration

The entire wealth of ʿAlī at that time was limited to a shield and a sword – with which he waged the holy wars – and a camel, which he used for work in the groves of Medina, the work which allowed him to be independent of any material assistance from the Helpers.

After the initial proposal and the wedding ceremony, it was time for ʿAlī to provide some basic furnishings for his home and to commence his marital life with Fāṭimah. The Prophet accepted that ʿAlī should sell his armour, and put the proceeds toward the dowry for Fāṭimah, to be left in the Prophet's possession. The armour was sold for 400 dirhams. The Prophet left some of this money with Bilāl to purchase perfume for Fāṭimah, and the rest was given to ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir and some of his companions to buy various household goods for Fāṭimah and ʿAlī. From the following list of Fāṭimah's dowry the life style of this honourable lady of Islam can be fully appreciated. The assistants of the Prophet returned from the market and what they obtained for Fāṭimah is as follows:

1. a dress worth 7 dirhams;
2. a scarf worth 1 dirham;
3. a black gown (which did not cover the whole of the body);
4. an Arabian bed made of wood and palm leaves;
5. two mattresses of Egyptian cotton, one filled with wool, and the other with palm leaves;
6. four pillows of wool and the other two of palm leaves;
7. some curtains;
8. a Hajari mat;
9. a hand mill;
10. a large wash basin;
11. a leathern bottle;
12. a wooden bowl for milk;
13. a leathern waterskin;
14. a pitcher;

15. a large copper container;
16. a number of jugs;
17. a silver bracelet.

The Prophet's companions presented him with the purchased items and he made the following supplication upon seeing these furnishing: 'O God, bless this folk whose utensils consist of earthenware.'[1]

The Dowry of Fāṭimah

The dowry of the Prophet's daughter was 500 dirhams. Each dirham is equivalent to one *mithqāl* of silver (each *mithqāl* being equivalent to 18 *nukhūd*s).

The marriage ceremony of the noble daughter of the Prophet was performed with utmost simplicity. After one month had elapsed since the marriage, the Prophet's wives said to 'Alī: 'Why do you not take your wife to your house?' 'Alī in reply to them announced his readiness to do so. Umm Ayman went to the Prophet and said: 'If Khadījah were alive, then the marriage ceremony of her daughter would bring light to her eyes'. When the Prophet heard the name of Khadījah, his holy eyes were filled with tears, and he said: 'When every once denied me, she believed in me, and for the sake of God's religion she supported me with her wealth, and for the spread of Islam she assisted me.'[2]

Umm Ayman added: 'Bring light to our eyes by sending Fāṭimah to her husband's house'. The Prophet ordered that, in preparation for the wedding night, one of the rooms be made ready, and Fāṭimah be adorned.[3]

When the time arrived for the bride to go to the house of the bridegroom, the Prophet called Fāṭimah to him. In a state of profound humility, beads of sweat forming on her forehead, Fāṭimah approached the Prophet. On account of the depth of her shyness, her foot slipped and she nearly fell; at that moment the Prophet prayed: 'May God protect you from any slip (*'athrah*) in this world and in the hereafter'. Then he unveiled Fāṭimah's face and put her hand in the hand of 'Alī, congratulated him and said: 'O 'Alī, God bless you with the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭimah, the most excellent wife'. Then he turned to Fāṭimah and said: 'The most excellent husband, 'Alī'. Then he ordered both of them to proceed to their house, and instructed so noble a person as Salmān al-Fārsī to hold the reins of Fāṭimah's camel, in order thereby to indicate the lofty station of his beloved daughter.

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[1] Ibid., p. 94; *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 359; according to the latter source all of Fāṭimah's possessions were purchased for 63 dirhams.

[2] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 43, p. 130.

[3] Ibid., vol. 43, p. 59.

At the moment when the bride and bridegroom entered the bridal chamber, they both looked down to the floor on account of their extreme modesty and shyness. The Prophet entered the chamber with a bowl of water in his hands and blessed Fāṭimah's head and body by sprinkling water over her, then he prayed:

> O God, this is my daughter, and the most beloved of all creatures to me. O God, and this is my brother, and the most beloved of all creatures to me...O God, make firm the bond of their love...[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 96.

5

The Heroism of ʿAlī in the Battle of Uḥud

The Quraysh were deeply depressed on account of their defeat at the Battle of Badr. In an effort to make amends and compensate for their material and spiritual setback, and to take revenge for their killed tribesmen, they decided to recruit experienced warriors of different Arabian tribes and to mobilise a well-equipped army and to proceed to Medina. Therefore, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, together with a number of others, was sent on a mission to persuade the tribes of Kinānah and Thaqīf to join them for this war against the Muslims. They succeeded in rallying three thousand warriors for this cause.

However, the Prophet was informed by his followers of the intention of the Quraysh and their mission to mobilise forces for war against the Muslims. Consequently, he called for a military consultative assembly to decide about the means of confronting the enemy. It was the opinion of the majority to leave Medina, and to fight the enemy forces outside the city. After performing the Friday prayers, the Prophet, at the head of an army of one thousand warriors, left Medina for Mount Uḥud.

On 7 Shawwāl 3 / 23 March 625, the Muslim and Quraysh armies were ranged opposite each other. The camp of the Muslims was positioned such that it backed on to Mount Uḥud, which provided protection. However, in the middle of the mountain there was a passage, through which the enemy could pass, wheel around the mountain, and then appear behind the Muslim camp. To guard against this danger, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jubayr was ordered by the Prophet to keep guard and be vigilant on the hilltops opposite this passage; with fifty archers he was to ensure that enemy did not penetrate the Muslim ranks and pass through that passage. He was ordered not to move from that spot under any circumstances, even if the Muslims were victorious and the enemy took flight. Then the Prophet handed the flag to Muṣʿab ibn ʿUmayr. He was from Banū ʿAbd al-Dār, and the standard-bearer of the army of Quraysh was also from the same tribe.

Battle commenced. Very soon, due to the bravery of the Muslims, the warriors of the Quraysh incurred heavy losses and consequently, they fled from the battlefield in an attempt to save their lives. The archers who were positioned on the hilltops assumed that they were no longer required to stand guard at that point. In clear violation of the command of the Prophet, they left their post in order to take their share of the spoils. Khālid ibn Walīd, a courageous warrior of the Quraysh army, knew from the very beginning of the battle that the passage in question was the strategic key to victory. He made repeated forays against the post that guarded the passage, trying to penetrate the Muslim forces, but the archers on guard forcefully resisted, and he had no choice but to retreat. One time, however, Khālid observed that the previously guarded position was utterly deserted. With one swift and sudden attack, he and his warriors entered the passage, wheeled around the mountain, and swooped upon the unarmed and heedless Muslims from behind. Uncontrollable chaos broke out among the Muslims. The retreating army of the Quraysh turned around and re-entered the field of battle.

At this point Muṣʿab ibn ʿUmayr, the standard-bearer of the Muslims, was killed by one of the enemy soldiers; due to his face being veiled, his killer wrongly thought that he had killed the Prophet and shouted: 'O people, know that Muḥammad has been killed!' The news of the Prophet's death spread among the Muslims; the majority – almost all – of them took flight, such that only a few, who could be counted on the fingers of one's hands, remained in the battlefield.

Ibn Hishām, the renowned historian, writes as follows:

> Anas ibn Naḍr, paternal uncle of Anas ibn Mālik narrated that when the army of Islam was under pressure, and the news of the Prophet's death spread, most of the Muslims tried to save their lives and everyone sought out some place for safety. He said: 'I saw a group of the Migrants and the Helpers, among them were ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb, Ṭalḥah, and ʿUbayd Allāh. They were thinking hard about how to save their lives. In a critical tone of voice I asked them: "Why are you sitting here?" They replied that the

> Prophet had been killed and that this was therefore a meaningless battle. I said to them: "If the Prophet has indeed been killed, then life itself is meaningless too; so rise up and sacrifice yourself in the same path for the sake of which he was martyred. Become a martyr, for even if Muḥammad is indeed dead, his God is alive." [...] I felt that my words had no effect on them; I took up my sword and entered the fray."[1]

Ibn Hishām continues:

> Anas was killed, his body being afflicted with seventy wounds; no one could recognise his corpse except his sister. Some groups of Muslims were so distressed that they were planning to rescue themselves, even considering having recourse to the hypocrite ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, so that he could obtain pardon for them from Abū Sufyān! Others took refuge in the mountain.[2]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes:

> In the year 608 AH / 1211 CE, someone was studying al-Wāqidī's *Maghāzī* under the renowned scholar, Muḥammad ibn Muʿidd al-ʿAlawī; one day I also attended the lecture until the lesson reached the point when Muḥammad ibn Maslamah explicitly narrated that at the Battle of Uḥud, he witnessed how the Muslims were climbing the mountain, and the Prophet was calling them by their names, addressing them: 'Come to me, such and such, come to me, such and such (*ilayya yā fulān, ilayya yā fulān*)!' But no one paid any heed to his call. At that point, the teacher turned to me and said: '*Fulān* refers to those people who, after the Prophet, acquired rank and status; but due to fear, the narrator had refrained from identifying them and explicitly mentioning their names.'[3]

Self-Sacrifice as a Sign of Faith

To sacrifice one's life is a sign of *īmān*, true faith in a transcendent goal. One can always measure the strength of *īmān* through an evaluation of the intensity of sacrifice, for, according to the Qurʾan: '*The faithful are only those who have attained faith in God and His messenger and then have*

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, pp. 83–84.

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, pp. 83–84.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 15, p. 23.

never doubted, and who wage jihad with their possessions and their persons in the way of God. It is they who are the truthful' (49:15).

The Battle of Uḥud was the best criterion for distinguishing between those who had true *īmān* from those who did not, and the best scale for measuring those who truly possessed an exalted degree of faith, from those who only claimed such a degree. The flight of a number of Muslims from the battle was so calamitous that the Muslim women who, in search of their sons, had entered the battleground, while nursing the injured and giving water to the thirsty ones, were forced to defend the Prophet. When a woman named Nusaybah observed the flight of the ostensible believers, she took up a sword herself and defended the Prophet. When the Prophet encountered her self-sacrificing action, he expressed his historical utterances regarding this courageous lady: 'The rank (*maqām*) of Nusaybah bint Ka'b is higher than *fulān* and *fulān* (such a person and such a person)!' Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd states: 'The narrator had betrayed the Prophet by not revealing the names which were explicitly mentioned by the Prophet'.[1]

In contrast to those who fled from the battle, the pages of history acknowledge the self-sacrifice of one distinguished companion, who, in the entire record of Islamic history proved to be the prime example of sacrificial devotion. The turning of the tide of the Battle of Uḥud, and thus the renewal of the initial victory of the Muslims, was the direct result of his heroic feats; he is none other than 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. The main reason for the escape of the warriors of Quraysh at the beginning of the battle was that 'Alī killed all nine of their standard-bearers, one after the other. Consequently, fear entered the hearts of the Quraysh to such an extent that all their resistance crumbled.[2]

A Comment on 'Alī's Devotion

Certain contemporary Egyptian writers, in their analyses of early Islamic history, have not taken sufficient account of 'Alī's rights and achievements, thus falling short of rendering appropriate homage to his high rank and real status, and not even reflecting accurately the undeniable facts of history, such as those that are recorded in the primary sources. Instead, they place 'Alī's devotion and sacrificial heroism at the same degree as the other believers. Thus it is necessary to mention briefly such acts of devotion and sacrifice as are mentioned in their own primary sources, thereby amplifying them.

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[1] Ibid., vol. 14, p. 266.

[2] Ibid., vol. 14, p. 250.

Firstly, Ibn Athīr has reported the following in his history:

> From every corner the Prophet was attacked by the forces of Quraysh. Whenever a group attacked him, 'Alī, under the command of the Prophet, went forth to fight them. By killing many of them, 'Alī caused distress in their army. This course of events recurred several times. The Archangel Gabriel descended to verify such self-sacrifice and, to the Prophet, expressed praise of 'Alī's heroism and willingness to sacrifice himself, saying that these are the most courageous feats that have ever been manifested by him. The Prophet acknowledged the sayings of Gabriel and said 'I am from 'Alī and he is from me'. Then a call was heard in the battlefield, the content of which was: no chivalrous youth (*fatā*) but 'Alī, no sword but Dhū al-Faqār.[1]

The events in question were more explicitly elaborated upon by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. He reported that a troop of fifty men attacked the Prophet, in an effort to kill him; but 'Alī, despite being on foot, repulsed them. He continues by describing the descent of the Archangel Gabriel, and then states:

> Besides the fact that this event has been clearly mentioned in history, I have seen this narrative in some copies of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq's *Ghazawāt.* One day I ventured to ask my master, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Sakīnah, whether this report was authentic, and he replied in the affirmative. I asked him why the authors of *Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah* [the six books of hadith deemed canonical in Sunni Islam] do not mention this report. In reply he said: 'We have many authentic reports which the authors of the *Ṣiḥāḥ* neglected to report.'[2]

Secondly, in a famous discourse addressed to Ra's al-Yahūd where a number of his companions were present, 'Alī refers to his own sacrificial heroism and states: 'At the time, when the army of the Quraysh attacked us like a torrent, the Helpers and the Migrants fled, taking the road home, while I, though afflicted with seventy wounds, defended the Prophet.'

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[1] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 107.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, p. 215.

Then he removed his cloak and pointed to the traces of the wounds. According to al-Ṣadūq's *Khiṣāl*, the resistance put up by ʿAlī in his valiant defence of the Prophet was so intense that his sword broke, and the Prophet gave his sword, called Dhū al-Faqār, to ʿAlī so that he was able to continue his fight in the cause of God.[1]

Thirdly, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes:

> When most of the Muslim warriors ran away, the pressure of the enemy upon the Prophet increased greatly. A group from the Banū Kinānah tribe and another group from the Banū ʿAbd Manāf tribe, among whom were four renowned warriors, sought to kill the Prophet, while ʿAlī was protecting the Prophet and preventing the enemy from coming close to the Prophet. A group of warriors, numbering more than fifty, made a strong attempt on the Prophet's life, but due to the stinging counter-attacks of ʿAlī, they were dispersed. However, they gathered at another spot, and resumed their attack. During this assault, the four mentioned warriors and ten other ones – whose names are not given in the sources – were killed by ʿAlī. The Archangel Gabriel congratulated the Prophet, praising the courageous acts of ʿAlī. The Prophet replied by saying: "ʿAlī is from me and I am from ʿAlī'.

Fourthly, in pre-modern times, the one who was appointed as standard-bearer in any battle enjoyed a special rank, for the standard was only given to the most exceptional warriors. The survival of the standard-bearer, and his bearing aloft of the standard, was a source of encouragement and a boost for the morale of the other warriors. Therefore, to prevent any loss of morale, a number of standard-bearers were appointed, so that if one was killed, another would be ready to take it up in his place.

The warriors of the Quraysh were aware of the bravery of the Muslims in the Battle of Badr. So, they decided to appoint a number of their most courageous warriors as standard-bearers. The first standard-bearer of the Quraysh army was Ṭalḥah ibn Ṭulayḥah. He was the first one of the standard-bearers who was given the death blow by ʿAlī. All of the following series of standard-bearers, one after the other, were struck down by ʿAlī. Their names were as follows: Saʿīd ibn Ṭalḥah, ʿUthmān ibn Ṭalḥah, Shāfiʿ ibn Ṭalḥah, Ḥārith ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, ʿAzīz ibn ʿUthmān, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jamīlah, Arṭāh ibn Shuraḥbīl, and Ṣawʾab.

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[1] Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 15.

With the death of these standard-bearers, the army of the Quraysh fled from the scene. In this way, and due to ʿAlī's astonishing heroism, the Muslims attained their initial victory in the battle.[1] Shaykh al-Mufīd in his *Irshād* narrates from Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq that the number of Quraysh standard-bearers was nine, and that all of them, one after another, were struck down by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. In his *Sīrah*, Ibn Hishām mentions other warriors of Quraysh who, during the first onslaught, were felled by the sword of ʿAlī.[2]

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[1] Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, p. 103; Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, p. 115; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 20, p. 15.

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, pp. 81–84.

6

A Decisive Victory for Islam over Idolatry (*shirk*)

The vast army of Arab idolaters were confronted by a deep trench (*khandaq*) which had been dug by the Muslims around Medina six days prior to their arrival. They had assumed that, like the previous time, the Muslims would confront them in the desert of Uḥud; but this time they found no trace of them. Consequently, they continued to advance until they reached the gates of Medina where, to their astonishment, they found a deep trench in the way of all the points of entry into Medina. The number of fighters mobilised by the Quraysh exceeded 10,000, while that of the Muslim army was no more than 3,000.[1]

Medina was besieged for approximately one month. Each time the fighters of Quraysh attempted to cross over the trench, they were confronted by strong resistance from the Muslim guards who were positioned at short intervals along the trench in their fortifications. Both sides spent the days and nights shooting arrows, but no side could prevail over the other.

To continue in this manner was becoming increasingly difficult for the Quraysh, as colder weather was approaching, and an ever diminishing supply of food for themselves, their horses, and their camels threatened their survival. The initial fervour for the fight had cooled, as fatigue and weakness set in, and morale was on the wane. On account of these conditions the army commanders had no alternative but to order a daring breach of the trench by six of their strongest warriors. These warriors examined the trench carefully, and noticing a narrow passage, they succeeded in crossing the trench and reaching the other side. One of them, a warrior by the name of 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wadd, was renowned as the most powerful and courageous warrior of the whole of Arabia. His strength compared with that of a thousand fighters. He was fully covered in steel armour. He roared like a lion to the Muslim fighters ranged in ranks before him, challenging them thus: 'Where are the pretenders to paradise? Is there not a single man among you who can send me to hell, or whom I can send to paradise?' His words resounded as a veritable summons to death; his continuous roars penetrated with such terrifying force that ears turned deaf and tongues were tied, unable to reply.[1]

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[1] Al-Maqrīzī, *Imtāʿ al-Asmāʿ*, quoted from Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 238.

Once again the battle-hardened Arab warrior released the bridle of his horse, and proudly marched in front of the Muslim ranks, issuing his challenge for single combat. Every time this fierce fighter shouted, it was only one young man who rose and asked permission of the Prophet to take up the challenge, but the Prophet denied him permission; the young man was 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. In response to his request the Prophet said: 'Sit down, this is 'Amr!'

For the third time 'Amr shouted: 'I am losing my voice through all this shouting! Is there nobody who can step forward to fight me?' Once again, 'Alī asked the Prophet for permission to fight him. The Prophet again replied: 'This challenger is 'Amr!' 'Alī replied, 'So be it'. Finally the Prophet accepted his request and placed upon 'Alī's head his own turban, handed over to him his own sword, and prayed for him thus: 'O God, protect 'Alī against all evil. Almighty Lord, in the Battle of Badr, you took 'Ubaydah and in Uḥud, the Lion of God, Ḥamzah. O Lord, protect 'Alī.'[2] And he recited this Qur'anic verse: *'My Lord! Do not leave me without an heir, and You are the best of inheritors'* (21:89). Then he continued with this historic declaration: 'Total faith confronts total idolatry.'[3]

'Alī was the complete manifestation of faith as 'Amr was the complete manifestation of disbelief and *shirk*. One of the meanings of this saying of the Prophet might be that the distance between faith and *shirk* had reached its narrowest point, and the defeat of faith in this battle might establish *shirk* in the world.

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[1] See al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 2, p. 48, who in reference to this account says, 'birds were sitting on their heads' (on account of their immobility).

[2] *Ta'rīkh al-Khamīs*, vol. 1, p. 486.

[3] *Kanz al-Fawā'id*, p. 137.

In order to make amends for the delay in the response to ʿAmr's challenge, ʿAlī speedily charged towards the field of battle, reciting a *rajaz*, in the same rhyme and rhythm of ʿAmr's *rajaz*, the content of which was: 'Hasten not! A man of power is coming to respond to your challenge.' ʿAlī was bedecked in metal armour, and his eyes glistened through his helmet. ʿAmr, upon recognising ʿAlī, held back from fighting him, and said: 'Your father was a friend of mine and I do not want to shed the blood of his progeny.'

In this connection Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes:

> My teacher, Abū al-Khayr, when teaching this passage of history, said: "Amr had participated in the Battle of Badr and had witnessed ʿAlī's courageous combat, therefore, his statement was a pretence, made out of fear of confrontation with such a valiant warrior as ʿAlī.' Eventually, ʿAlī said: 'Do not grieve for my death, for whether I be killed or am victorious, I will be blessed and my place will be in paradise, but whatever be the outcome, it is hellfire that awaits you!' At this point ʿAmr smiled and said: 'Nephew, this is not a fair deal; may paradise and hell both be yours."[1]

Then, ʿAlī reminded ʿAmr of an oath which he had taken; that if someone from Quraysh made two requests to him, he would accept one; this was confirmed by ʿAmr. ʿAlī continued: 'My first request is that you convert to Islam.'

ʿAmr replied: 'It is better to avoid this request as I have no need for your religion.'

ʿAlī added: 'Then do not engage in this battle, return to your place of birth and let others deal with the Prophet; if he succeeds, it will be an honour for Quraysh and if he is killed, your wish will have come true, without your having had to fight.'

In response ʿAmr replied: 'Even the women of Quraysh do not utter such remarks. How can I return, when I have reached Muḥammad, and I am now in a position where I can fulfil my vow; for after the Battle of Badr I made a vow not to oil my head until I take my revenge upon Muḥammad.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 148.

This time ʿAlī said: 'Then there is no option but to prepare to fight and let our swords decide the issue.'

The experienced and battle-hardened warrior then raged with anger. But, seeing that ʿAlī was on foot, he dismounted from his horse. He charged at ʿAlī with his sword, aiming a strike at his head. ʿAlī reacted in an instant and deflected the blow with his shield. But his shield was split in two, his helmet had also broken, and his head was injured. Nonetheless, ʿAlī seized the opportunity that now offered itself and struck ʿAmr so forcefully that he fell to the ground. The sound of clashing swords was heard, but the flying dust of the battlefield formed a cloud, preventing the two sides from seeing how the fight was proceeding. But when ʿAlī's shout of *Allāhu akbar* ('God is Greatest') was heard, a joyous clamour arose from the Muslim ranks, and they realised that ʿAlī had vanquished the mighty warrior of the pagan Arabs.

The killing of this renowned warrior resulted in the fleeing of the other five challengers, namely, ʿIkrimah, Hubayrah, Nawfal, Ḍirār, and Mirdās, who had followed ʿAmr across the trench and were waiting for the outcome of ʿAlī's combat with ʿAmr. Four of them managed to re-cross the trench and flee headlong towards their army camp, but the fifth one, Nawfal, fell into the trench. ʿAlī, who was chasing him, entered the trench and gave him the death blow.[1]

The death of this hero extinguished the fire of war, and the warriors who had been enlisted from different Arabian tribes decided to return to their homeland. Soon, the whole army of Quraysh, already weakened by the cold weather, and the shortage of food, decided to take the road for home. The foundation of nascent Islam, which had been threatened by the most powerful army ever mobilised against it, was once again secure and protected, under the rays of light emanating from the selfless courage and devotion of ʿAlī.

The Value of this Courageous Feat

Many people are unaware of the details of this battle, and, in particular, are ignorant of how deplorable a condition overcame the Muslims, when the cries of this renowned warrior seized them with terror. For far-removed spectators of the scene, looking from afar, the true value of ʿAlī's courage cannot be fully realised; it is only for a scholar who has carefully studied this event in history, evaluating and analysing it with precision, that the true value of this feat of selfless devotion and courage is revealed.

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[1] *Ta'rīkh al-Khamīs*, vol. 1, p. 487.

In this evaluation, it suffices to be aware that if ʿAlī had refrained from combat, none of the Muslims had the courage to challenge this violent champion; and nothing is more disgraceful for an army than to remain silent in response to a challenge to fight – the result would be a collapse of morale and a spiritual defeat. Even if the enemy had been unable to penetrate the trench and had abandoned the battle, such a disgrace would have forever soiled the good name of the Muslim fighters on the pages of history.

Had ʿAlī not accepted the challenge, or had he been killed, the soldiers who encircled the Prophet at the foot of the Salʿ mountain, and were trembling with fear at the thunderous roars of the Arab warrior, would all have climbed the mountain to escape to safety. As is clearly seen in the sources, during the battles of Uḥud and Ḥunayn, only a few warriors continued to defend the Prophet while the rest took flight, leaving the Prophet alone in the battlefield.

Had ʿAlī been defeated, not only would the warriors at the foot of Mount Salʿ have left the standard of Islam, but also the soldiers guarding the trench would have left their posts and run to safety. In this battle, had ʿAlī not confronted the advanced contingent of Quraysh warriors, or had he been killed, the Quraysh army would have succeeded in crossing over the trench, moving up to the gates of Medina; and the final result would have been nothing but the victory of *shirk* over the religion of *tawḥīd*, thus the cessation of the spread of Islam forever.

On the basis of these considerations, the Prophet said, through divine inspiration, the following crucial words concerning the selfless courage of ʿAlī: 'A strike of the sword of ʿAlī at the Battle of Khandaq is better than the worship of the *thaqalayn* (two heavy things; i.e. the jinn and mankind).'[1]

The philosophy underlying such an evaluation is quite clear: without such selfless courage and devotion, the world would be filled with *shirk* and there would be no illuminating lamp to which the *thaqalayn* (i.e. jinn and mankind) could be attracted, in order that their worship and devotion to God be guided aright by the radiance of its luminosity.

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 32; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 20, p. 216.

At this point, one can assert with pride that the Muslim world and the followers of all monotheistic religions are indebted to 'Alī's sublime act of selfless courage. In other words, during the past fourteen centuries, Islam and the entire domain of faith are beholden to him for this feat.

In addition to his fearless bravery, the chivalry of this saint was of such a magnitude that, after killing 'Amr, he did not touch his valuable armour, instead he turned to leave the battlefield while 'Amr's body was lying on the ground. Although 'Amr himself reproached 'Alī for this, 'Alī ignored him. It was on this account that, when the sister of 'Amr arrived at the place where her brother's body lay, she said: 'I will not shed a tear for you, because you have been killed by such a magnanimous man, one who did not touch your expensive armour or your weapons.'[1]

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 32, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 20, p. 33.

7

The Battle of Khaybar and Three Major Honours

How did the tongues of his enemies start praising the virtues and merits of ʿAlī, and how did the gathering organised to defame him turn into one that praised him?

Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī's martyrdom gave Muʿāwiyah an opportunity to prepare the ground for the caliphate of his son, Yazīd. He succeeded in gaining the pledge of allegiance for Yazīd from the Prophet's close companions who were living in Mecca and Medina.

It was for the purpose of securing the succession of his son to the caliphate that Muʿāwiyah left Syria for Mecca. During his stay, Muʿāwiyah met the Prophet's companions in the religious circles of the Hejaz. After performance of the hajj rituals, he took rest in Dār al-Nadwah, a centre for the gatherings of Quraysh leaders in the pre-Islamic period. While there, he established a dialogue with Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and other high-ranking personalities whose approval was vital for Yazīd's caliphate.

In Dār al-Nadwah, Muʿāwiyah sat on a couch specially prepared for him and asked Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ to sit next to him. He wished to take advantage of the situation and tried to make the occasion one in which he could speak ill of ʿAlī, censure his actions, and altogether defame his good name. However, to say such negative things about ʿAlī – right next to the Kaʿbah, and in the presence of many companions of the Prophet who were fully aware of ʿAlī's extraordinary merits and distinctions, his nobility, and his selfless devotion to the cause of Islam – was no easy task. The companions also knew that not long ago the Kaʿbah, both inside the holy house itself and outside, in its precincts, was full of idols which were destroyed by the hands of none other than ʿAlī. For the Prophet had told ʿAlī to stand on his holy shoulders and overturn and smash the idols that had been worshipped for years – worshipped by such people as Muʿāwiyah himself and his forefathers – thus bringing humiliation and disgrace to the idols that once were recipients of such reverence and devotion.[1] It was against such a background that one should view the effort of Muʿāwiyah – now pretending to believe in the religion of the One God – to criticise and revile the most selfless devotee of this religion, one through whose courageous feats the seed of *tawḥīd* germinated in the hearts of so many, enabling buds, leaves, and branches to grow.

Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ bore a secret enmity against ʿAlī. He was jealous of ʿAlī's distinctions and spiritual status. The day ʿUthmān was killed by protestors from the province of Egypt, the overwhelming majority of the people elected ʿAlī as their caliph with full approval. Only a few refused to swear allegiance to ʿAlī, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ being one of them. At that time, when ʿAmmār sought allegiance for ʿAlī from Saʿd, his reply was unpleasant. ʿAmmār reported this behaviour to ʿAlī, who replied: 'His jealousy has prevented him from making the pact of allegiance and working together with us'.

The opposition of Saʿd had, in earlier times, become so evident that when the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb, established the council (*shūrā*) of six members to determine his successor, appointing as members Saʿd and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf (the latter being Saʿd's cousin and ʿUthmān's brother-in-law), the people left out of the council said that by appointing such members, ʿUmar wanted to block ʿAlī's way to the caliphate for the third time. Their prediction came true.

Despite his previous animosity and opposition to ʿAlī, Saʿd trembled upon hearing Muʿāwiyah's words reviling ʿAlī, and gave the following speech.

> You made me sit on your couch to speak ill of ʿAlī? I swear to God that ʿAlī had three great distinctions; if I had but one of them it would be far better than possessing everything under the sun. The first: when the Prophet appointed him as his deputy in charge of the affairs of Medina when he departed for the campaign of Tabūk, he said to ʿAlī:

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 2, p. 367; *Taʾrīkh al-Khamīs*, vol. 2, p. 95.

'Your station (*manzilah*) in relation to me is that of Aaron (in relation to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me.' The second: on the day of the *mubāhalah* (mutual imprecation) between the Prophet and the Christians of Najrān, the Prophet held the hands of 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn and said: 'O God, these are my household.' And the third: when the Muslims had conquered many strongholds of the Jews of Khaybar, but could not take the fortress of Qamūṣ, the major fortress and the centre of the resistance of the courageous Jewish warriors. The forces of Islam had besieged that fortress for eight days but could not conquer it. The Messenger was suffering from acute headache and was unable to be present in the battlefield to command the army. Every day he gave the flag to one of the army leaders who all returned without victory. One day he gave the flag to Abū Bakr and the next day to 'Umar, but both returned to the Prophet without any success. The continuation of this situation became difficult for the Prophet, so he declared: 'Tomorrow I will give the standard to someone who never retreats from battle or turns away from the enemy. He is the one whom God and His messenger love. God shall conquer this fortress at his hands'. When this statement was conveyed to 'Alī, he turned towards God and said: 'O Lord, whatever You withhold, none can bestow, and whatever You bestow, none can withhold.'

[...] When the sun was rising, the Prophet's companions gathered around his tent to see to whom this great honour would be given. When the Messenger stepped out of his tent, all necks were straining in his direction. I stood in front of the Prophet, hoping that I might have this privilege. The *shaykhayn* [i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar] were wishing more than others that this honour might fall to them. Suddenly the Prophet asked: 'Where is 'Alī?' The people told him that 'Alī was suffering from an eye affliction, and that he was resting. The Prophet ordered Salamah ibn Akwaʿ to go to 'Alī's tent. He took his hand and brought him to the Prophet who supplicated for him, and this supplication was answered; 'Alī's eyes were healed. At that moment, the Prophet covered 'Alī with his armour and fastened his own sword (Dhū al-Faqār) on his waist. He handed him the standard, reminding him that before starting the battle, he must invite the enemy to embrace Islam. If they refused, he was to inform them that, by removing their weapons and paying the *jizyah* tax,

> they would be allowed to live in freedom and to practise their religion under the flag of Islam. If none of these conditions were accepted by the enemy, the Prophet continued, then ʿAlī was to wage war. He further told ʿAlī that he should know that if God guided a single person through him, it would be better than owning red camels [i.e. immense wealth] and spending such wealth in the way of God.[1]

After mentioning these incidents, which we have cited in full here, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, evidently displeased, walked out of Muʿāwiyah's gathering.

The Decisive Victory of Islam at Khaybar

Once again, the Muslims achieved a decisive victory through the selfless courage of ʿAlī, who was known as the *fātiḥ khaybar* (the Conqueror of Khaybar). ʿAlī marched towards the fortress, along with a number of warriors who were following him, and hoisted the flag of Islam. At that moment, the warriors inside the fortress came out. One of them, Ḥārith, the brother of Marḥab, advanced towards ʿAlī and gave the challenge for single combat. His shout was so vehement and forceful that the warriors behind ʿAlī stepped backwards. He attacked ʿAlī but a moment later his dead body fell on the ground.

Marḥab was deeply affected by his brother's death. He advanced with anger, seeking revenge, fully equipped with strong armour protecting his body, and a steel helmet protecting his head. Both warriors were reciting *rajaz* verses of war. The clashing swords and lances of two warriors, one for the cause of Islam, the other representing the Jews, inspired awe in the hearts of the onlookers. Suddenly, with a thunderous sweep of the sword, ʿAlī struck the head of Marḥab. It was the death blow. Most of the Jewish warriors who were behind Marḥab began to flee, but some of them resisted and fought duels with ʿAlī, who killed all of them.

The moment had arrived for ʿAlī to enter the fortress. However, the massive bolted gate prevented him and his soldiers from doing so. Thanks to the miraculous intervention of divine power, ʿAlī was enabled to uproot the gate of Khaybar, thus paving the way for his soldiers to enter. In this way he destroyed the last den of corruption and the Muslims were able to overcome the threat of enemies who had (and still have) continuous animosity and hatred for Islam and Muslims.[1]

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[1] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 22, 23; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 7, p. 120; *Taʾrīkh al-Khamīs*, vol. 2, p. 95; *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, vol. 4, p. 314, quoted from *Murūj al-Dhahab*.

ʿAlī's Station in Relation to the Prophet

We have just spoken of one of ʿAlī's three distinctions that Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ mentioned in his meeting with Muʿāwiyah, and it is worth mentioning briefly the other two. One of ʿAlī's honours is that he accompanied the Prophet in all of the battles in which the Prophet participated – except the Battle of Tabūk – and was his special companion and standard bearer in all of them. During the campaign of Tabūk, as noted earlier, ʿAlī was ordered by the Messenger to remain in Medina. The Prophet was fully aware that the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) were intent on rebelling during his absence. Consequently, he told ʿAlī: 'You are in charge of my household, my relatives, and the Migrants; and no one is qualified for this task except you or myself.'

The fact that ʿAlī remained in Medina foiled the conspirators' plan. Therefore, they concocted another plot, this time intended to make him leave Medina. They spread false rumours about tensions in the relationship between the Prophet and ʿAlī. They also said that it was only because of the long distance and scorching heat that ʿAlī had refrained from taking part in this holy war.

The Messenger was not far away from Medina when this rumour had spread. In order to formulate the correct reply to this accusation, ʿAlī went to consult with the Prophet. The Prophet pacified him and made the historical remark to which Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ referred, saying that he wished it were said to him: 'Are you not content to have in relation to me the station of Aaron in relation to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me?'[2]

This hadith is known among the Muslim scholars as *ḥadīth al-manzilah* (the hadith of the station, or rank) in which the station of Aaron – together with all its functions and responsibilities – was affirmed in regard to ʿAlī, except for the function of prophethood (*nubuwwah*), which would be sealed and thus come to an end after the Prophet Muḥammad. It is a *mutawātir* hadith, that is, enjoying the highest possible degree of authenticity, having been narrated by so many chains of reliable transmitters that no doubt about its authenticity can be entertained; it is found in all the major sources of hadith and biographies of the Prophet.

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[1] For further details of the conquest of Khaybar, the manner in which the fortress was entered by the Imam, and other events pertaining to this episode in the history of Islam, the reader is referred to the primary sources of hadith and of works of *sīrah* (biography of the Prophet).

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 520; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 21, p. 207; In his *Murājaʿāt*, the late Sharaf al-Dīn has compiled all the sources of this hadith.

The third distinction mentioned by Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ was related to the *mubāhalah*, a supplication to God to reveal which party was in the right; this was a challenge made under divine inspiration by the Prophet to the Christians of Najrān. After a debate with the Prophet regarding the false doctrines of Christianity, they refused to accept Islam but they were prepared to enter into the *mubāhalah*.

The time for the *mubāhalah* had come. The Prophet chose only four members of his family to participate in this historical event. These four persons were none other than ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and their two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, for there was no one among the entire Muslim community more pure and more deeply rooted in faith than these four.

The Prophet traversed the distance between his house and the place designated for the *mubāhalah* in a special manner. He carried Ḥusayn in his arms, held Ḥasan's hand, while Fāṭimah and ʿAlī walked behind him. Before entering the designated place, the Prophet told his companions: 'Whenever I make a supplication, say "amen" after me.'

The luminous faces of the Prophet and the four members of his family – three of whom were direct branches of the tree of his sacred essence – created such an upheaval among the Christians of Najrān that their Archbishop told them: 'I am perceiving such faces that, were they to turn to the Almighty in a *mubāhalah*, this desert would be transformed into the fire of hell, and the punishment would extend from here to the land of Najrān'. Consequently, the Christians declined the challenge of the *mubāhalah*, and agreed to pay the *jizyah* instead.

ʿĀ'ishah narrates: 'On the day of the *mubāhalah*, the Prophet covered with his black cloak the four persons he had taken with him, and recited this verse of the Qur'an: "*Indeed, God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification*" (33:33).'

As Zamakhsharī states: 'The episode of the *mubāhalah* and the content of this verse is the greatest testimony to the merit and distinction (*faḍīlah*) of the *aṣḥāb al-kisā'* (the folk of the [Prophet's] cloak, i.e. the *ahl al-bayt*) and a clear proof of the truthfulness of the religion of Islam.'[1]

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[1] Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 1, pp. 282–283. See also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 471–472.

8

Justice Engenders Enmity

'Alī is extremely exacting and rigorous in upholding the divine law; neither flattery nor sycophancy can make inroads into his life. (Hadith of the Prophet)

Those individuals who follow a sacred goal during their lives, and strive for it to their utmost day and night, cannot remain indifferent when confronted with affairs that run counter to that transcendent cause. In the course of pursuing their path to their lofty goal, they will acquire the love and admiration of some, but incite the anger and animosity of others. In this path, it will only be the pure of heart, those with a clear conscience, who will be able to accept the strictness of just governance, together with all its rigours, doing so in fact with great admiration. By contrast, those who are indifferent and those who are unscrupulous will be unhappy with the strictures of an uncompromisingly just rule.

Those who happily live with both right and wrong, Muslims and non-Muslims, who would avoid conflict, anger, and animosity at any cost, cannot be governed by a higher purpose or by authentic principles. For such indiscriminate collaboration with all types of people cannot but lead to hypocrisy and two-facedness.

During 'Alī's caliphate, someone praised the local governor of his region and said: 'Everyone from all walks of life is pleased with him'. 'Alī said: 'It is clear that he cannot be a just person, because the satisfaction of all reveals his hypocrisy, collaboration, and injustice; for were it otherwise, all the people could not possibly be pleased with him.'

‘Alī is one of those noble and just persons who arouse the loving devotion of the righteous and pure hearted ones, while inflaming the anger of the wicked and the greedy, violators of justice and legality.

‘Alī’s reputation for justice, the strict application of the law and unflinching adherence to principles did not pertain only to the period of his caliphate – even though most of the writers and narrators when referring to his piety and governance emphasise events that took place during his caliphate because this was the time when conditions were suitable for manifesting the sublimity of his justice as the ruler, in the wider context of political, legal, and social life. Rather, his justice, his strict propriety and his complete adherence to principles was established and well known from the time of the Prophet. His attachment to justice was so strict that it proved intolerable for many, and occasionally they complained to the Prophet who rebuffed them, saying that regarding the execution of the divine law, ‘Alī saw nothing but the law – in other words, he would make no allowances for individuals, whatever special rights and privileges they may attribute to themselves. In this respect, many events took place during the Prophet’s life; two of them can be mentioned here by way of example.

The first example is from the 10 AH / 631 CE when the Messenger decided to go to Mecca to perform the hajj rituals. He sent ‘Alī with a group of Muslims to Yemen. The Prophet had asked ‘Alī to stop on his way back at Najrān to collect from its Christians the cloth they had promised to give, according to the agreement made on the day of *mubāhalah*, and to deliver it to the Prophet. After collecting the cloth, he was informed that the Prophet was on his way to Mecca, so he diverted his route towards Mecca. To speed up his journey to meet the Prophet earlier, he left the cloth with one of his officers and hastened towards Mecca. He met the Prophet near the city. The Messenger was overjoyed at seeing him. Seeing him in the *iḥram* (the pilgrim’s garb), the Prophet asked what his intention was. ‘Alī replied: ‘While wearing the pilgrim’s garb, I prayed to God that my intention be the same as the Prophet’s.’ He then informed the Messenger about his mission to Yemen and the collection of the cloth from the Christians of Najrān. The Prophet commanded him to return to his soldiers and to accompany them back to Mecca. When ‘Alī reached his soldiers, he noticed that the officer to whom he deputed authority in his absence had distributed the entire collection of cloth among the soldiers and they had donned them as their *iḥram*. 'Alī became very angry by such impropriety, and asked the officer: 'Why did you distribute this cloth before delivering it to the Prophet?' He replied: 'Your soldiers insisted to have them distributed now, in the form of so many loans on trust, and after pilgrimage, to collect all the pieces from them'. 'Alī did not accept his excuse and said: 'You had no right to do this'. Then he ordered all the cloth to be collected there and then, so that it could be delivered to the Prophet in Mecca.[1]

Some of the soldiers who were always unhappy with the strict application of justice and who always baulked at such remorseless discipline, and who wished instead only for their own personal desires to be gratified, went to the Prophet. They complained to him against 'Alī's strictness, completely overlooking the fact that such a violation of the law, and gratuitous deviation from what was prescribed, always leads to far greater violations of the law. From 'Alī's point of view, a wrongdoer – especially if he regards his sin as something insignificant – resembles a rider who mounts an unruly and uncontrollable horse; such a horse will certainly throw his rider into the fire.[2]

The purpose of this analogy is to underline the fact that any sin, however minor it be deemed, will be followed by major sins, until the one who commits them is altogether immersed in sin and falls into the fire of hell. Therefore, it is necessary that, from the very beginning, one must make every effort to fear God, guard against all sin and disobedience, and endeavour to adhere to all the laws of Islam.

The Prophet, who of course was fully aware of 'Alī's justice and the propriety of his action, sent one of his companions to those who were complaining, to speak on his behalf: 'Stop speaking ill of 'Alī. He is extremely exacting and rigorous in executing the divine law; neither flattery nor sycophancy has any way to enter into his life.'

The second example involves Khālid ibn Walīd who was one of the powerful Qurayshi commanders. In 7 AH / 628 CE he migrated from Mecca to Medina and joined the Muslims. Prior to his conversion to Islam he had frequently participated in the battles fought by Quraysh with the aim of overthrowing the newly founded religion. It was he who in the Battle of Uḥud attacked the Muslim warriors from behind. This man, even after converting to Islam, retained his hostility to ʿAlī and was jealous of ʿAlī's unique chivalry and strength. After the passing away of the Prophet, he decided to assassinate ʿAlī at the order of the caliph of the time – but, for various reasons he was unsuccessful.[1]

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[1] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 21, p. 385.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 16.

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal wrote in his *Musnad*: 'The Prophet appointed ʿAlī as a leader of a group sent to Yemen, a group in which Khālid was included. Somewhere in Yemen, the Muslim army fought with the tribe of the Banū Zayd, defeating them and acquiring thereby certain spoils. ʿAlī's manner of distributing of the spoils was unsatisfactory to Khālid. In an attempt to create a misunderstanding between ʿAlī and the Prophet, he wrote a letter to the Prophet and gave it to Buraydah to deliver it quickly.'

Buraydah said: 'I made haste and arrived at Medina where I delivered the letter to the Prophet. He gave the letter to one of his companions to read it for him. When the letter was read to the end, I noticed that signs of anger suddenly appeared on the Prophet's face and I deeply regretted bringing such a letter. In an effort to exonerate myself, I said that I had been ordered by Khālid to deliver this letter, and I had no choice but to obey the command of my superior.'

Then, he continued: 'After I had spoken, silence prevailed. Suddenly, the Messenger broke the silence and said: "Do not speak ill of ʿAlī; he is from me and I am from him and he is your master after me."'

Buraydah continued: 'I was filled with remorse for what I had done, and I begged the Prophet to ask forgiveness for me. But he said: "Until ʿAlī comes and gives his approval for such an action, I will not pray for your forgiveness." Suddenly ʿAlī arrived and I begged him to request the Prophet to pray for my forgiveness.'[2]

This episode caused Buraydah to sever his friendship with Khālid and become loyal to ʿAlī. This loyalty continued after the Prophet's death, to such an extent that Buraydah refused to swear allegiance to Abū Bakr, and was one of the twelve persons who sought from Abū Bakr an explanation of his right to be the successor; he did not recognise him as a caliph.[3]

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[1] For details pertaining to this affair, see Part 4, which deals with the life of Imam ʿAlī after the death of the Prophet.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 1, p. 176; *Darajāt al-Rafīʿah*, p. 401.

[3] Al-Māmaqānī, *Rijāl*, vol. 1, p. 199, citing Ṭabrisī's *al-Iḥtijāj*.

9

The Emissary and Special Representative of the Prophet

By divine command, during the hajj rituals, ʿAlī recited the verses of Sūrah al-Tawbah to all the Arab tribes, and delivered an unequivocal declaration to uproot idolatry; and to accomplish this mission, he sat in the place of the Prophet.

Islamic history records, as seen earlier, that on the day the Messenger declared his prophetic mission, he simultaneously announced ʿAlī as his successor. During the twenty-three years of his prophethood, the Prophet often implicitly and explicitly declared to the people ʿAlī's distinctions, his authority, and his worthiness to be the leader of the Muslim community. The Prophet gave particular pieces of advice to those whom he thought likely to enter into opposition to ʿAlī after his death, and even gave warnings of divine punishment should they oppose ʿAlī.

It is astonishing that the chief of the Banū ʿĀmir tribe suggested once to the Prophet that he was willing to defend his religion in earnest, provided that he be appointed as successor to the Prophet, and thus become the ruler of the Muslim *ummah* after the passing away of the Prophet. The Prophet replied: 'This is an issue that pertains to God; He will place it [i.e. the leadership] wherever He wills.'[1]

On another occasion, the governor of Yamāmah made a similar proposal to that made by the chief of the Banū ʿĀmir, but again the Prophet expressed his displeasure and struck his breast with his hand.[2]

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 8, p. 84; Ibn Athīr, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 65.

[2] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, p. 262.

In spite of this insistence that the question of his succession was a matter for God to decide, the Prophet did indeed, on several occasions, and with slightly different forms of expression, declare that 'Alī was his successor, thereby notifying the Muslims that God Himself had chosen 'Alī as the Prophet's *waṣī* (executor) and *khalīfah* (successor), and that he himself had no choice in this matter. A few examples can be mentioned. Firstly, after the commencement of the prophetic mission, God ordered the Prophet to invite his relatives to accept Islam, a gathering during which the Prophet nominated 'Alī as his *waṣī* (executor), *khalīfah* (successor), and *wazīr* (minister). Secondly, on his way to Tabūk, the Prophet acknowledged 'Alī's station in relation to himself as consisting of the same station possessed by Aaron in relation to Moses, thus affirming for 'Alī all of Aaron's functions except that of prophethood (*nubuwwah*). Thirdly, the Prophet had said to Buraydah and other Muslims that ''Alī is the most worthy and deserving leader after me.' Fourthly, at the oasis of Ghadīr, in front of eighty thousand people (or more) the Prophet held 'Alī's hand and declared him to be the leader of the Muslims, and clarified for the people their responsibilities in regard to him.

In addition to the above instances, the Prophet occasionally assigned to 'Alī certain political duties, in this manner preparing the minds and hearts of the Muslims for the acceptance of his leadership. The following suffices by way of example.

More than two decades had elapsed since the Islamic logic contradicting idolatry and polytheism had spread among the idolatrous tribes of Arabia, and almost all were aware of the Islamic principle that worshipping idols was nothing but a false tradition inherited from their ancestors. They also knew that idols were helpless and could not defend even themselves let alone helping others; there was no point in worshipping them or paying homage to them.

Those whose consciences were awakened, and whose hearts were pure, listened to the Prophet and managed to transform their lives profoundly, turning away utterly from idolatry towards authentic worship of the one and only true God. When the Prophet conquered Mecca, and the spokesmen of Islam acquired the freedom to spread the Islamic message, a large number of people began to break the idols. They performed these acts to the accompaniment of shouts affirming the oneness of God; thus, echoes of the words of *tawḥīd* resounded throughout the Hejaz. However, it was difficult for a group of prejudiced and ignorant individuals to change old habits and rid themselves of superstitions and false traditions, even though persisting in these idolatrous habits meant that they were in a state of constant conflict with their consciences.

The time had come for the noble Prophet to use military power to eliminate all forms and manifestations of idolatry and inhuman practices. Through the use of this power, he decided to uproot idolatry which was (and is) the source of all corruption, both moral and social, and which violated the very substance of what it meant to be human. He declared the displeasure of God and His messenger on the day of ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā' (the feast of the sacrifice, at the climax of the hajj rituals), when a huge gathering from all over Hejaz had assembled in Minā. This was to be done by reciting himself, or having someone recite for him, a passage from the beginning of Sūrah al-Tawbah, which expresses God and His messenger's displeasure with the idolaters; and in that massive gathering, the idolaters of Hejaz were told with a voice loud and clear that they must establish their status unequivocally within the following four months: either they must accept the religion of Islam and become Muslims enjoying equal material and spiritual privileges with all other Muslims; or be obstinate, remain as polytheists, and thus prepare for warfare; they were warned that wherever they were caught, they would be killed.

When the first verses of Sūrah al-Tawbah were revealed, the Messenger had no plan to perform the hajj rituals because he had performed the hajj in the previous year, when Mecca was conquered; so he had decided to go to Mecca for this purpose in the following year, in what became the Farewell Pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-widāʿ*). Therefore, he had to select someone to announce the divine decrees which were contained in the first part of Sūrah al-Tawbah. First, he called Abū Bakr, taught him these verses, and sent him together with forty men to Mecca to read the verses to the pilgrims on of the occasion of ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā'

While Abū Bakr was on his way to Mecca, the divine revelation suddenly descended upon the Prophet, ordering him to convey the message either by himself or through some member of his family, since nobody else was authorised to convey this 'message' (*lā yu'addīhā ʿanka illā anta aw rajulun minka*, or according to some other narratives: *rajulun min ahli baytika*).[1] Now the question one needs to ask is this: who, among the

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[1] See for example, Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 4, p. 545.

Prophet's household, was, in the eyes of the Divine, the person chosen to wear this sacred mantle?

It was not long when the noble Messenger summoned 'Alī and commanded him to go to Mecca, reaching Abū Bakr on his way, take the verses from him, and tell him that according to the divine command these verses must be read out to the people either by the Messenger himself or by one of the members of his household, so the task was to be transferred to 'Alī. Riding the Prophet's special camel, 'Alī set off for Mecca accompanied by Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh and a group of companions. They reached Abū Bakr on the road to Mecca and conveyed to him the Prophet's message and he duly handed over the verses to 'Alī.

'Alī entered Mecca on 10 Dhū al-Ḥijjah. At Jamrat al-'Aqabah he read out thirteen verses of Sūrah al-Tawbah, and declared in a loud voice the four point declaration of the Prophet to everyone present. The idolaters realised they had only four months to clarify their position and formal status to the Islamic state. The Qur'anic verses and the prophetic declaration had a deep impact on the idolaters, so they embraced Islam in droves before the end of the fixed period of four months, and *shirk* was uprooted from Hejaz before the end of 10 AH.

Unjust Prejudices

When Abū Bakr realised he had been removed from this mission, he returned to Medina greatly discontented, complaining to the Messenger: 'Why did you deem me worthy of this mission [to convey the verses and the declaration], and then, after so short a time, you removed me from it? Was there any command from the Divine regarding this issue?'

The Messenger of God said, in a kind tone of voice: 'A divine command was revealed to me ordering me that apart from myself or a member of my household, no one is authorised to carry out this mission.'[1] Some prejudiced writers, who were prone to analysing 'Alī's merits and distinctions in a distorted manner, interpreted Abū Bakr's removal from, and 'Alī's appointment to, the position in question in the following way: Abū Bakr was the manifestation of compassion and 'Alī was the manifestation of power and bravery; conveying Sūrah al-Tawbah, and the declaration of the

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[1] *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 10, p. 45, commentary on Sūrah al-Tawbah.

Prophet's stern document, required a courageous heart and great spiritual force, qualities which 'Alī possessed in greater abundance.

This interpretation is nothing but the expression of an inappropriate prejudice. As was mentioned above, the Messenger himself contradicted such an interpretation, when he explained clearly the reason for the removal of the one and appointment of the other differently: apart from himself or someone from himself, no one else was authorised to perform this task.

Ibn Kathīr in his commentary gives a different analysis of this incident. He maintains that it was the way of the Arabs to follow this custom: whenever a person wanted to break his promise, either he himself or else one of his relatives had to do the task, otherwise the agreement would remain in force. It was for this reason, he argues, that 'Alī was chosen.

This explanation, again, clearly contradicts the Prophet's stated reason for sending 'Alī to convey the verses in question and the declaration. It had nothing to do with the breaking of a promise, or the sending of one of his own family for such a task. The fourth verse of Sūrah al-Tawbah reads as follows: '[But the treatises are] not dissolved with the pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in anything, nor aided anyone against you. So, fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their terms: for God loves the righteous.' This verse explicitly indicates that any contract which is duly observed by all parties must be respected until the period of the contract lapses. As a result, if there were any question of breaching an agreement with those who had themselves violated a contract, such an aspect could only have a secondary significance in the declaration in question; the fundamental objective of the Prophet was, however, to affirm that idolatry was a violation of the laws of religion, and was an unpardonable sin.

If we wish to judge this historical incident impartially, we must understand that the Prophet of Islam, under divine command, had the basic intention to bestow upon 'Alī – already during his own lifetime – a particular set of political responsibilities, so that the Muslims might become more aware of his status and become accustomed to refer to him on matters of state and governance. In this way, once the sun of revelation had set, the people would have become used to referring to him as their authority. They would know that, after the passing away of the Prophet, no one was more worthy to rule over this domain than 'Alī. For they had seen that the only person appointed by God Himself to declare the removal of protection from the pagans of Mecca – an act manifestly pertaining to governance – was none other than ʿAlī.

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10

A Plan for the Future of the Muslims

The universal movement of Islam was born in opposition to the idolatry of the Quraysh, and indeed of all the pagans throughout the entire Arabian peninsula. A whole range of conspiracies were hatched in an attempt to extinguish this celestial lamp, but to no avail. The final hope of the pagan Arabs was the destruction of the pillars of this movement with the death of the Prophet. They assumed that his invitation to true religion would die with him, just as had been the case for others who lived before him.[1]

The intrigues of the idolaters are reflected in many verses of the Qur'an. Regarding the Prophet's death, the following verses divulge their intentions: '*Do they say, "[He is] a poet, for whom we await a fatal accident?" Say, "Wait! I too am waiting along with you." Is it their intellect which prompts them to [say] this, or are they a rebellious lot?*' (52:30–32).

For the time being, we will put aside the details of these futile intrigues and how the enemies of Islam were unable to prevent the spread of Islam. Our investigation turns to the circumstances after the Prophet's death which guaranteed the survival of the message. There are two aspects to this debate.

The first concerns the intellectual maturity of the Muslim *ummah*. This maturity should have developed to such an extent that after the Messenger's passing away, the Muslims would be able to remain faithful to the prophetic mission and guide the newly established movement along the straight path, avoiding all deviation, thereby guaranteeing that future generations would be led along this path of rectitude.

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[1] Such as Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who had studied certain Christian scriptures and as a result abandoned paganism and became a Christian.

Unfortunately, though, after the death of the Prophet most of the leading figures of the nascent community lacked the full range of qualifications necessary for the complete guidance of the *ummah* – authoritative guidance pertaining to all aspects of human life. This is not the place to enter into all the details pertaining to this shortcoming. Suffice it to say that the complete transformation of the hearts and minds of an entire people does not happen overnight, nor even in a year or a decade. The original founder of a religion, who wishes the movement inaugurated by him to take root, and to guarantee its survival as well as its effective penetration into the hearts of future generations, cannot expect such a goal to be attained in a short period of time.

The establishing of firm foundations for the new religion, and the sowing of its principles deep in the hearts of the people – such that the community does not revert to ingrained ancestral beliefs, practices, customs, and modes of morality – requires the right leadership for subsequent generations. It needs a distinguished person or persons to control the movement with care, sensitivity, and vigilance; ensuring that through correct instruction, teaching, and propagation, society is protected against all kinds of unhealthy tendencies and influences, so that when the current generation passes away, the new one – brought up from the start according to the ethical and spiritual ideals of Islam – can assume its place in society.

Among the revealed religions, Islam has some very special characteristics, and this necessitated the guidance of a particular group of leaders to maintain its stability and continuity. Firstly, Islam appeared among the most backward people of the world. From the point of view of a civilised order, these people were sorely lacking in the fundamental principles of social order, morality, culture, and most other values proper to human society. As regards authentic religious traditions, they were devoid of any authentic practices, apart from that of the hajj, which was inherited from their ancestors. The teachings of Moses and Jesus had not penetrated in those territories, so most of the inhabitants of the Hejaz were ignorant of them. By contrast, *jāhilī* customs and beliefs had fully penetrated into their hearts, and were woven into their souls.

Religious change in these societies is of course possible, but to maintain its continuity demands vigilance and perseverance, in order to prevent any kind of deviations from the true path or retreat into old ways.

The deplorable events that took place at the battles of Uḥud and Ḥunayn – when, in the heat of battle, the adherents of the new religious movement dispersed and abandoned the Prophet, leaving him alone on the field of battle – constitute vivid testimony that the Prophet's companions had not attained the necessary intellectual and spiritual degree which would enable the Prophet to bestow responsibility for the state upon their shoulders, and to ensure the failure of the final plot of the enemies of Islam: the hope that with the death of the Prophet the religion he inaugurated would likewise pass away.

It is evident that the transferral of political leadership to the *ummah* could not have secured the aim of the Prophet in this regard; hence, another solution had to be found, to which we now turn.

The second aspect involves recalling that the correct way to ensure the maintenance and continuation of the Islamic movement would be to select for rule the most highly qualified and worthy person; one whose belief in the principles of religion, and all their concomitants and ramifications, was at one with that of the Prophet. Only the leadership of a person whose faith was absolute, whose knowledge was vast, and whose conduct was impeccable – one rendered by God free of sin and error – could guarantee the perpetuation of this transformative religion.

It is precisely the soundness and authenticity of this point of view that is proclaimed by the Shiʿa school of thought. History provides abundant evidence that, on 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 10 / 14 March 632, the Prophet, on his return from the Farewell Pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-widāʿ*), resolved this thorny issue. The Prophet appointed his *khalīfah* (successor) and *waṣī* (executor), under divine inspiration, thus securing the future and the stability of Islam.

Two Views Concerning the Imamate

From the Shiʿa point of view, the leadership of the *ummah* is a divine office bestowed by the decree of God upon the most knowledgeable and meritorious person in the Islamic *ummah*. The difference between an imam and a prophet (*nabī*) is that a prophet is the founder of a particular shariah, that is, a particular divine law, and is one who receives revelation (*waḥy*), and who transmits to the people a specific scripture. An imam has none of these qualifications or functions, but, in addition to being responsible for governance of the polity, he has the function of rendering explicit certain aspects of the religion which the Prophet – on account of the absence of the appropriate conditions or through lack of opportunity – left, precisely, to his heirs (*waṣāyā*) to elucidate.

Thus, from the Shiʿa perspective, a Muslim leader (caliph, imam) must not only govern the polity, and execute Islamic law, guard and protect the frontiers of the state and safeguard its proper interests; he must also resolve those obscure and difficult points of religious doctrine, and interpret and apply legal principles through a correct understanding of all their implications and ramifications, which the founder of the religion had not necessarily explained.

By contrast, from the point of view of the Sunni scholars, the caliphate consists of nothing more than a political institution, the purpose of which is to uphold the formal sovereignty of Islam and secure the material rights of the Muslims. The caliph is elected on the basis of public opinion, and his task is to manage the economic, judicial, and political affairs of the state. Other matters and the task of elucidating certain aspects of the law – whose basic principles were laid down in a general manner by the Prophet, but the full ramifications of which were not specified by him, for one reason or another – devolves upon the Muslim scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*), who are supposed to deal with the problems and difficulties pertaining to them by employing the interpretive tool of *ijtihād* (intellectual effort based on the sources of Islamic law).

Consequently, two different views regarding the issue of the caliphate appeared among the Muslims. They formed into two factions, and their differences are still unresolved to this day. According to the first perspective, the imam shares with the prophet certain responsibilities and functions, and some of the qualifications and conditions for prophethood are also necessary for the imamate. These can be summarised as follows:

1. The Prophet must be infallible (*maʿṣūm*). This means that it is not possible for him to commit any sin throughout his life. He enjoys immunity from any mistake or error in explaining the legal precepts and spiritual realities of religion; and in answering people's questions concerning religion he never gives anything but the

correct answer. An imam must likewise be infallible. The reason for this is the same as it is in regard to the Prophet.

2. The Prophet must be the highest authority on divine law (shariah); no religious points of law must be hidden from him. An imam also – insofar as it is his function to explain and complete those aspects of the application of the shariah which remained unexplained during the time of the Prophet – must be the most knowledgeable person regarding all legal principles and religious precepts.
3. Prophethood (*nubuwwah*) is determined through appointment (*intiṣāb*) and not through election (*intikhāb*), for a prophet is always appointed by God, and assumes the function of prophethood only as a direct result of divine dictate. Only God can differentiate between fallible and infallible souls, and only God knows those who, thanks to the graces emanating from the unseen domain, have attained that spiritual station in which perfect knowledge of all the finest points of religious doctrine has been realised.

These three essential pre-requisites for true prophethood apply also to the imam, the legitimate successor to the Prophet.

However, according to the second point of view, that of Sunni Islam, none of these criteria for prophethood are applicable to the imamate or the caliphate. That is, infallibility is not a condition for being an imam (or caliph), nor is justice, knowledge, all-encompassing comprehension of the divine law, appointment by God, or having a relationship with the unseen. Rather, it suffices that the imam be in full possession of normal human faculties, that he consult with the Muslims, uphold the formal framework of Islam, maintain law and order and endeavour to expand the domain of Islam through jihad and proselytisation (*daʿwah*).

We now turn to the fundamental question concerning the imamate: is the imam's position determined by appointment or through election? Also, was it necessary for the Prophet personally to appoint his successor, or was this task entrusted to the *ummah*? These questions can be discussed and resolved in the light of an analysis of the historical context of nascent Islam, and the reader will be able to see clearly that certain key social, cultural, and (especially) political circumstances made it necessary for the Prophet himself to resolve the problem of his succession during his own lifetime, rather than leaving it to the *ummah* to resolve after his death.

There can be no doubt that the religion of Islam is the final and universal religion; and that for as long as he was alive, the Prophet Muḥammad was the leader of the Muslims; and that after his passing away, it was imperative that the most worthy person among the Muslims should become his successor and the leader of the *ummah*. In regard to the question of whether the office of the leader, after the Prophet, should be based on popular election or on divine designation (*tanṣīṣ*), there are two points of view.

In the Shiʿa perspective, the position of leadership is one of designation and appointment (*tanṣīṣ*), and the succession to the Prophet must be determined by divine command. In the Sunni perspective, by contrast, it is believed that this position is one of election (*intikhāb*); according to this view, the *ummah* had to choose someone to govern the affairs of state. Each group justifies and corroborates its own point of view with its own arguments and proofs, which can easily be found in their respective doctrinal sources. What can be done here is to present a brief analysis of the circumstances prevailing at the time of the Prophet, such as might help determine which of the two views can be affirmed and proven to be correct.

The domestic and foreign policy of Islam during the earthly life of the Prophet required the Prophet's successor to be appointed by God and by means of the Prophet himself. The reason was that Islamic society was threatened persistently from three sides: from Persia, from Byzantium, and from the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) – whether the threat took the form of war, the fomenting of corruption, or sowing of discord within Muslim society. The well-being and security of the *ummah* called out for the Prophet to appoint a political leader himself, one who could unite the *ummah* in its confrontation with the external enemy, and ensure that the enemy had no foothold within Muslim society – such as would be provided by internal discord and disunity – by means of which its influence could penetrate and destroy the *ummah*. It would be appropriate to delve further into this argument.

On one side of the dangerous triangle facing Islam was the Byzantine empire. This mighty power was situated to the north of Arabia. The problem posed by the Byzantines was a paramount strategic concern for the Prophet, and he was preoccupied with this very problem right up to the day he passed away. The first Muslim military confrontation with the Byzantine army took place in the year 8 AH / 629 CE in Palestine. This battle resulted in the defeat of the Muslim army and the martyrdom of three eminent leaders of early Islam, namely, Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib (al-Ṭayyār), Zayd ibn Ḥārithah and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah.

The withdrawal of the Muslim army from the battlefield boosted the military ambition of the Byzantine emperor. The fear of further attacks from the Byzantines thus became a constant pre-occupation for the newly founded state of Islam. For this reason, in 9 AH / 630 CE the Prophet led the army himself, and with a powerful force, marched towards the borders of Syria. In this severe and harsh campaign, the Muslim army managed to regain something of its glorious past and revive its political life. However, the limited victories won during the campaign did not satisfy the Prophet. Therefore, a few days prior to the onset of his final illness, he appointed Usāmah ibn Zayd as commander of the army, and ordered him to advance towards the borders of Syria and to confront the Byzantines.

The second side of the deadly triangle was formed by the Persian empire. It is well known that the Persian king, Khusraw II, angrily tore the Prophet's letter into pieces, insulted the Prophet's envoy, and expelled him from his palace and his kingdom.[1] He even wrote to his governor in Yemen, instructing him to arrest the Messenger and, in case he resisted, to kill him.

Even though Khusraw II died during the Prophet's lifetime, the fear that Yemen (which for a long time had been a Persian colony) may acquire independence dominated the minds of the Persian kings, on account of their pride and arrogance. The idea of Yemen ridding itself of Persian imperial control and acquiring independence was intolerable to them.

The third danger came from the hypocrites within the Muslim community. They constantly acted as a fifth column among the Muslims, going so far as to plan to kill the Prophet on his way from Tabūk to Medina. As noted earlier, many of them were hoping that with the Prophet's death, the message also would pass away, and they would be liberated from its yoke (see Qur'an 52:30–32).

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[1] That is, Khusraw II, the Sassanid King (r. 590, 591–628). [Translator]

After the Prophet's passing away, Abū Sufyān instigated an appalling ruse. He sought to pledge allegiance to 'Alī and thus create division and opposition among the Muslims. However, 'Alī was aware of his evil intentions and responded negatively, saying to him: 'I swear to God that you have no other aim but to create discord and corruption, and it is not only today that you want to ignite discord (*fitnah*), rather you have repeatedly striven for evil. Be sure that I have no need of you.'[1]

The destructive power of the hypocrites was of such proportions that it is referred to repeatedly in the Qur'an; all of the following *sūrahs* contain a reference to the hypocrites: Āl 'Imrān, *sūrahs* al-Nisā', al-Mā'idah, al-Anfāl al-Tawbah, al-'Ankabūt, al-Aḥzāb, Muḥammad, al-Fatḥ, al-Mujādilah, al-Ḥadīd, al-Munāfiqūn, and al-Ḥashr.

Is it conceivable, with such powerful enemies lurking in such close proximity, eager to pounce on the young polity, that the Prophet would fail to appoint a political and religious successor to guide and protect the newly established Islamic state and society? The most basic socio-political assessment reveals clearly that it was imperative for the Prophet to prevent any kind of internal discord over the succession, and to designate clearly the person who should succeed him, thus allowing the Muslims to unite behind a strong and stable line of defence. In addition, an explicit designation of his successor would forestall any kind of factionalism or tribalism; each group would, in the absence of a successor unequivocally appointed by the Prophet himself, claim that it had the greatest right to rule. The only way to avoid this happening would be for the Prophet to appoint his successor during his own lifetime.

This investigation into the political and social conditions of the time clearly enables us to affirm that it was necessary for the office of leader and successor to be determined by explicit designation (*tanṣīṣ*) and not election. It was perhaps for this reason, among others, that from the very beginning of his prophetic mission right up to his dying breath, the Prophet repeatedly made clear who was to be his successor. That is, he designated the person who was to succeed him both at the commencement of his mission and at its end. It is necessary to refer to these two episodes and clarify their significance for the discussion at hand.

Leaving aside for the moment the intellectual and philosophical arguments, and the evaluations on the social and political plane, which uphold and affirm the validity of the first, that is, the Shiʿa point of view, there are numerous prophetic hadiths which confirm the position articulated by Shiʿa scholars. During his mission, the Messenger repeatedly declared who was to be his *khalīfah* (successor) and *waṣī* (executor), removing the position of the imamate from the domain of public election or choice. Not only did he appoint his successor at the end of his life, but also at the very dawn of the prophetic mission, when hardly one hundred individuals supported him.

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[1] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 220; *'Iqd al-Fard*, vol. 2, p. 249.

As was noted earlier, on the day he was ordered by God to warn his relatives of the divine punishment and to invite them to accept the religion of *tawhīd*, he asserted the following principle to the assembled gathering of forty-five leading figures of his clan, the Banū Hāshim: 'The first person from you to assist me shall be my brother, my executor (*waṣī*) and my successor (*khalīfah*) among you'. At that moment ʿAlī stood up and acknowledged his message. The Prophet faced the gathering and said: 'This young man is my brother, my executor, and my successor.'

This hadith is well known and fully authenticated by the historians and traditionists, who refer to it as *ḥadīth yawm al-dār* (the hadith of the day of the abode) and *ḥadīth bad' al-daʿwah* (the hadith at the commencement of the call). The Prophet repeatedly reaffirmed this declaration, both at home and while on his travels, referring to ʿAlī's authority and right to the succession, but none of these occasions can be compared with the hadith of Ghadīr in terms of magnitude and clarity, publicity and profundity. We turn now to a detailed account of this vital declaration.

Ghadīr Khumm

In the year 10 AH / 631 CE, the Prophet departed for Mecca in order to perform, and to teach, the rites of the hajj. On this occasion the pilgrimage season fell in the final year of his life. For this reason it was called the Farewell Pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-widāʿ*). The number of people who wished to accompany the Prophet, or to learn the hajj rituals from him, was estimated at around one hundred and twenty thousand.

Once the rites of the hajj had ended, the Prophet left Mecca for Medina with a huge crowd escorting him, consisting of both those who joined him in Mecca and the entire group of his fellow-pilgrims who had accompanied him from Medina. When the caravan reached a barren land called Ghadīr Khumm, situated three miles from Juḥfah,[1] the Archangel Gabriel descended and commanded the Prophet to halt. The Prophet thus ordered all his followers to halt and wait for the others who were left behind to join them.

This sudden halt called by the Prophet, at such an apparently inappropriate time, in an area without water, in the midday heat, with the blazing sun and burning sand, greatly surprised all the travellers in the caravan. They said to themselves that the only explanation was that an important command had been revealed by God to the Prophet, one of such importance that the Prophet immediately ordered them to halt at such an uncongenial place, stop what they were doing, and convey to all the message received.

The divine order was given to the Prophet with the revelation of this verse: '*O Prophet! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and God shall protect you from the people*' (5:67). Careful reflection on the content of this verse leads to the following points.

Firstly, the command was of such immense magnitude that if, out of fear, the Messenger refrained from conveying God's decree – an impossible supposition – he would have failed to accomplish his prophetic mission; but by conveying it, he will have discharged his prophetic responsibility, and his mission would be brought to completion.

In other words, the meaning of 'that which has been sent down to you' cannot be the conveying of all the the verses of the Qur'an or all the rulings of Islamic law. For it is obvious, indeed, it goes without saying, that if ever the Prophet failed to convey the totality of the divinely revealed injunction, his prophetic mission would be incomplete. Such an evident fact does not require a specific revelation. Rather, the meaning here can only be that what is to be conveyed is a special order, conveying which is considered a complement to prophethood and without this being conveyed, the prophetic duty remains undischarged. Consequently, the message in question must pertain to an important principle of Islam, one which is strongly linked to the other key Islamic principles and precepts; therefore, after the principles of *tawḥīd* and *nubuwwah*, this principle must be regarded as the most important principle to be conveyed in the *risālah* (message) of the Prophet.

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[1] Juḥfah is near Rabigh placed on the way to Medina, one of the resting-places during the hajj rituals.

Secondly, from the point of view of the social and political considerations mentioned above, it is likely that the Prophet expected a negative reaction from the people if this particular divine order were conveyed. Thus, in order to strengthen the Prophet's resolve, God declares: 'And God will defend thee against the people'. One should now try to evaluate which of the commentators on this verse come closest to interpreting this verse in the light of its connection with the specification of this particular mission.

Shi'a traditionists, together with some thirty among the renowned Sunni traditionists[1] maintain that this verse was revealed at Ghadīr Khumm, and that after its revelation, the Prophet was commanded by God to proclaim 'Alī as the *mawlā* (master) of the believers.

This *wilāyah*, or authority, of 'Alī, and also the fact of his being the successor to the Prophet, was an issue of such profound significance that the completion of the mission of the Prophet required its proclamation; and that, conversely, failure to proclaim it would entail the incompleteness of that mission.

One can appreciate, in the light of the social and political factors described earlier, why it was that the Prophet should have feared the negative reaction of certain people; for it would be very difficult, especially for companions of greater age and experience to accept as successor to the Prophet a man who was no more than 33 years old.[2] Apart from this, 'Alī had killed in battle a number of close relative of the people who were now clustered around the Prophet. It would be very painful for such vengeful people to accept his authority.

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[1] In his precious work entitled *Ghadīr* (vol. 1, pp. 196–209), 'Allāmah Amīnī has referred in great detail to these thirty Sunni traditionists and scholars, among whom the following should be mentioned here: al-Ṭabarī, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, Ibn 'Asākir, Abū Isḥāq al-Ḥamawī, and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. He also refers to the following companions of the Prophet in the same connection: Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, and Barā' ibn 'Āzib have narrated the event of Ghadīr.

[2] This is especially so in the context of Arab tribal society, in which only the seniors were qualified for leadership and the juniors, a priori being considered inexperienced, were neglected. It was for this reason that a number of companions were critical of the decision of the Prophet when he appointed 'Attāb ibn Usayd as the governor of Mecca and Usāmah ibn Zayd as the commander of the army dispatched to Tabūk.

It should also be remembered that 'Alī was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law; to appoint such a person as caliph would be regarded as nepotism by narrow minded people.

Despite this uncongenial environment, it was the wise decree of the Almighty that the stability and continuity of the Islamic mission was best guaranteed by the appointment of 'Alī as successor to the Prophet; and that the universal message of Islam would be brought to completion by the specific designation by the Prophet of 'Alī as the leader and guide of the *ummah* after him.

Returning to our commentary on the event of Ghadīr, on the 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah, the scorching midday sun was shining intensely on the land of Ghadīr Khumm. Historical records show that between seventy to one hundred and twenty thousand people were assembled at this place in obedience to the order of the Prophet, and in expectation of an event of historic significance. The heat was so intense that they had torn their cloaks into two pieces, using one part to cover their heads and the other part placed under their feet.

At that highly sensitive moment, the call for the noon prayer echoed through the desert. People prepared themselves for prayer. The Prophet led the prayer in front of a massive congregation, the like of which had never been witnessed in the land of Ghadīr. After the prayers, the Prophet mounted a pulpit, assembled from camel-saddles, and then with a loud voice started his sermon: 'Praise be to the Lord, our God, Whose aid we seek and in Whom we believe. We trust in Him and take refuge from our evil desires and bad deeds in God, apart from Whom there is no guide. Whomever God guides will never go astray. We bear witness that there is no god but God, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger. O people! The time is approaching, when I will respond to the call of the Most High to depart this earthly life, saying *labbayk* ("at your service") to Him. I have my responsibility as you have yours. What do you say about me?'

The Messenger's companions replied: 'We testify that you have conveyed the religion of God to us, you have looked after us and guided us, striving hard in this cause – may God reward you with His blessings.'

Then, after the voices of the thousands present had died down, and silence once again prevailed over the assembly, the Prophet continued: 'Do you testify that there is no god except God, and that Muḥammad is

His servant and His messenger; and that paradise, hell, and death are true; and that there is no doubt concerning the Day of Resurrection; and that God will bring to life those who are buried and hidden in the earth?'

'Yes, yes, we testify', replied the Prophet's companions.

The Prophet continued: 'I shall leave two weighty things (*thaqalayn*) among you for remembrance; how will you treat them?'

Some unknown person asked: 'What do you mean by the two weighty things?'

The Prophet replied: 'The greater of the two is the Book of God, one side of which is in the Hands of God and the other, in your hands. Hold fast to it, so that you go not astray. And the lesser of the two is my progeny (*'itratī*), my household. My Lord had told me that these two things would never be separated from each other until the Day of Resurrection. O people, neither go before the Book of God and my progeny nor remain behind them, lest you be destroyed.'

At this moment, the Prophet held aloft 'Alī's arm and raised it so high that the white of his armpit appeared to the people, and the entire crowd saw 'Alī standing beside the Prophet and recognised him very clearly. Also, they realised that the purpose of this occasion was something very specifically related to 'Alī. So, with acute receptivity, they prepared themselves to listen to the Prophet's address.

> 'O people!' he said, 'who has greater priority over the believers than their own selves?'
>
> 'God and His messenger know best', replied the companions.
>
> The Prophet continued: 'God is my *mawlā* (master), and I am the *mawlā* of all of the believers; I am closer to them and have greater priority over them than they have over their own selves. O people! For whomsoever I am his *mawlā*, 'Alī is his *mawlā* and his leader.'

The Prophet repeated this last sentence three times.[1] Then he continued: 'O Lord! Befriend everyone who is the friend of 'Alī and be the enemy of everyone who is the enemy of 'Alī. O God, assist 'Alī's friends and humiliate and degrade his enemies. O God, make the Truth revolve around ʿAlī.' Then he added: 'It is imperative for those present to inform those who are absent that they may be aware of this matter.'

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[1] According to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad*, the Prophet repeats this sentence four times.

The huge crowd was still in place when the Archangel Gabriel descended and delivered glad tidings to the Prophet, telling him that God had perfected the mission and had bestowed His grace (*niʿmah*) upon the believers: '*Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion*' (5:3). At that moment the Prophet uttered loudly the *takbīr*, that is, *Allāhu akbar* (God is Greatest), and announced: 'I praise God for perfecting His religion and completing His grace; He is pleased with my mission (*risālah*) as well as with ʿAlī's *wilāyah* (authority) after me'.

Then the Prophet descended from the pulpit, and his companions, group by group, congratulated ʿAlī, calling him their *mawlā*. At this time, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, the Prophet's poet, stood up, and immortalised this great historical event, by expressing it in a magnificent poem. We translate two couplets from his famous ode:

> He [the Prophet] said to him [ʿAlī]: 'Stand up, ʿAlī, for truly I,
> I am happy to choose you as Imam and as guide after me.'
>
> So, for whomever I was his *mawlā*, then this is his leader (*walī*)
> So, be sincere supporters of him and followers.

What we have given here is a summary of that great historical event such as it is narrated in Sunni sources. The event is described in greater detail in Shiʿa sources. Those interested in the Prophet's sermon may refer to an extended version of it in the *Iḥtijāj* of al-Ṭabrisī.[1]

Ghadīr: An Unforgettable Event

It was the will of the All-Knowing that the historical event of Ghadīr remain preserved throughout the centuries, being kept alive in the hearts, and inscribed in the authentic sources. So much so that Muslim writers in every era have referred to it in their works, and in the authentic books of Qur'an exegesis (*tafsīr*), hadith, theology (*kalām*) and history. Also, preachers have always referred to it in their sermons as one of ʿAlī's undeniable distinctions. Besides preachers, poets and men of letters were inspired by this event. Their literary talent was set alight by deep reflection upon the meaning and significance of the event of Ghadīr, and their sincere orientation towards the one designated as the possessor of *wilāyah* engendered sublime literary creations in different forms and languages, all of which served to deepen, even further the remembrance of this crucial episode in Islamic history.

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[1] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj* (Najaf), vol. 1, pp. 71–84.

It can be argued that few historical events can compare with that of Ghadīr in respect of the attention devoted to it by so many learned scholars, including traditionists, commentators, theologians, philosophers, orators, poets, historians, and biographers.

One of the reasons for the perpetual remembrance of this saying of the Prophet is that two Qur'anic verses were revealed regarding this event (Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:3, 67). Consequently, for as long as the Qur'an remains, this historical event cannot be forgotten.

From the early period of Islamic history, this event was commemorated as a religious festival (*'īd*) in Islamic society. Nowadays, it is celebrated by Shi'a communities in much the same way as other religious festivals are celebrated.

The historical record reveals that 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah is considered among Muslims as 'Īd al-Ghadīr. According to Ibn Khallikān: 'In 487 [1094 CE], on the day of 'Īd al-Ghadīr, 18 of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, people pledged their allegiance to Musta'lā ibn Mustanṣir'.[1] Also, al-'Ubaydī writes about Mustanṣir bi-Allāh: 'He died in the year 487 [1094 CE], twelve nights before the end of the month. That was the night of 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah, the night of 'Īd al-Ghadīr'.[2]

Apart from these reports, other historians like al-Mas'ūdī,[3] and al-Tha'ālibī[4] had also mentioned this night as one of the famous religious festivals among the Muslims.

This Islamic festival is rooted in a particular act that took place on the day of Ghadīr: the Messenger of God ordered the Migrants and the Helpers, and also his wives, to congratulate 'Alī upon attaining this lofty distinction. Zayd ibn Arqam reports: 'Among the first people from the Migrants to shake hands with 'Alī were Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, Ṭalḥah, and Zubayr. The ceremony and the pledging of allegiance continued until sunset.'

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[1] *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol. 1, p. 60, vol. 2, p. 223.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, p. 822.

[4] *Thimār al-Qulūb*, p. 511.

As regards the importance of this authenticated event in history, it suffices to say that 110 of the Prophet's companions narrated the hadith of Ghadīr. No doubt there had been far more than the 110 people present who spoke about this event and related it; but this is the number who are mentioned in the books written by Sunni scholars. While it is possible that one hundred thousand people heard the Prophet's discourse, many of them had come from far-flung places in the Hejaz, so no transmission of this hadith can be traced to them. Another large group among the hearers of this hadith may well have transmitted it, but the historians were not able to register them, or else, they may have been registered but this information has not been conveyed to us.

In the second/eighth century, known as the generation of the *tābiʿūn* ('followers', that is, the generation following that of the Prophet and his companions), eighty-nine of them narrated this hadith.

During the later centuries, 360 Sunni scholars narrated this hadith with many others testifying to its soundness and authenticity. There were ninety-two scholars in the third century AH / ninth century CE, forty-three in the fourth/tenth century, twenty-four in the fifth/eleventh century, twenty in the sixth/twelfth century, twenty-one in the seventh/thirteenth century, eighteen in the eighth/fourteenth century, sixteen in the ninth/fifteenth century, fourteen in the tenth/sixteenth century, twelve in the eleventh/seventeenth century, thirteen in the twelfth/eighteenth century, twelve in the thirteenth/nineteenth century and twenty scholars in the fourteenth/twentieth century – who have narrated this hadith.

A group of them also were not content to simply narrate this hadith, they also wrote books specifically on its chains of transmission. Al-Ṭabarī, the great Islamic historian, cited in his book, *Wilāyah fī Ṭarīq Ḥadīth al-Ghadīr*, more than seventy chains of transmission for this hadith, going back to the Prophet.

Ibn 'Uqdah al-Kūfī, in his treatise entitled *Wilāyah*, wrote that 105 people had narrated this hadith. Abū Bakr Muḥhammad ibn 'Umar al-Baghdādī, known as al-Jaʿānī, related this hadith from twenty-five people. No less than twenty-six persons wrote books specifically on the subject of this historic event.

Eminent Shiʿa scholars have written excellent books on Ghadīr, the most comprehensive one being the work entitled *Ghadīr*, written by the great *mujāhid* and scholar, the late Ayatollah Amīnī. I have greatly benefited from his noble work in the writing of this section of Imam ʿAlī's biography.

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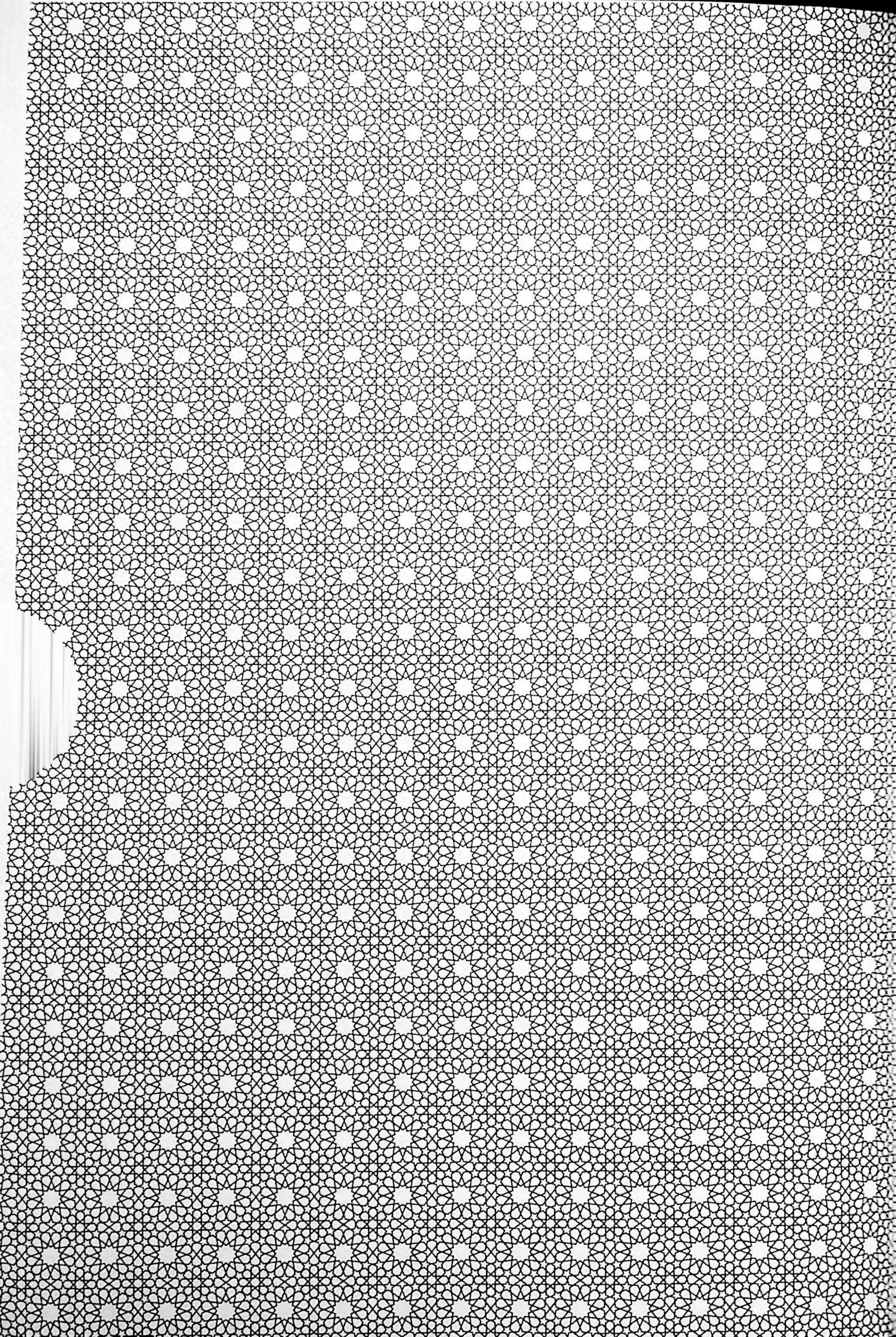

Part 4

ʿAlī's Life after the Death of the Prophet and before his Caliphate

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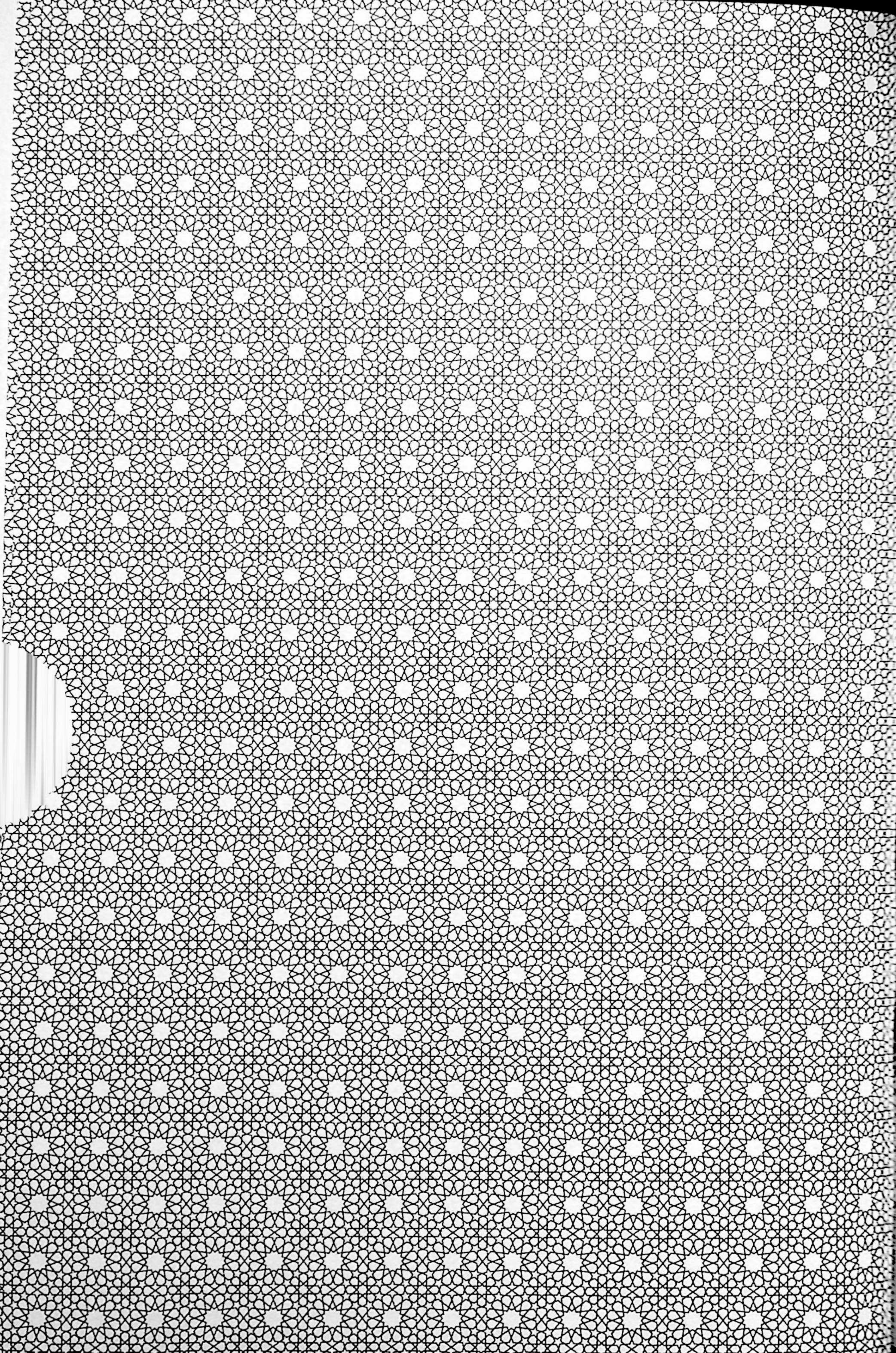

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Twenty-Five Years of Silence

Now we are at the end of our account of the major events of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's life that took place up to the Prophet's passing away. While a detailed analysis regarding many occurrences, incidents, and issues of secondary importance has been omitted, the most significant events manifesting the unfolding of ʿAlī's spiritual character and his unflinching faith have been presented. Now that we are more familiar with his virtues, his distinctions, and his merits, we turn to an examination of the fourth stage of his life.

The aforementioned three stages of his life lasted for thirty-three years. During this relatively short period, ʿAlī had been recognised as the greatest hero of Islam, an exalted leader and the most dazzling personality in Islamic history. After the passing away of the Prophet, no one could compare with ʿAlī in the realms of piety, knowledge, virtue, holy war, selfless sacrifice for the sake of God, and compassionate exertion for the sake of the poor.

In all quarters – whether it was in the Hejaz or in Yemen – talk of his courage, heroism, and sacrifice and the intense love of the Prophet for ʿAlī filled the air. It was obvious that in principle, after the passing away of the Prophet, ʿAlī should have been the pivot of Islam and the anchor of Muslim society. But when we turn the pages of history we find the opposite. As a result of a particular set of circumstances, for approximately one quarter of a century – covering the fourth phase of his life – ʿAlī retired from the social scene, taking up a life of practical seclusion, and choosing to remain silent. He neither participated in any jihad nor did he engage in any formal manner in any of the social or political affairs that unfolded during this period. He sheathed his sword and discharged his personal responsibilities, guiding and moulding the character of those close to him.

This silence and seclusion, for such a long period of time, on the part of such a person – who in the past was at the very fulcrum of Muslim society, being second in rank only to the Prophet, and almost universally acclaimed as one of the pillars of the nascent faith – was no simple matter. This magnanimous soul wished to master himself and adapt to the new situation, which, from every angle, contradicted the previous one. ʿAlī's activities in this period can be grouped into seven, as below.

1. Worship of God. This worship was of such intensity – in total accordance with his personality – that his grandson, Imam ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn, known as al-Sajjād ('the one who prostrates', on account of the intensity of his devotions), considered his own worship as insignificant as compared with that of his grandfather.
2. Commenting (*tafsīr*) on the Qur'an, and resolving the questions and problems raised in regard to its verses. ʿAlī trained disciples in this field, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, who, after ʿAlī himself, was considered as the highest authority in the discipline of *tafsīr*.
3. Answering the questions of scholars of different faiths and denominations, especially the Jews and Christians. Such people came to Medina after the death of the Prophet in order to investigate the beliefs and doctrines of Islam. They found no one except ʿAlī – whose comprehensive knowledge of the Torah and Gospels became obvious in the course of the discussions – who could answer their questions. If ʿAlī had not filled this void, Islamic society would have undergone severe humiliation at the hands of these religious scholars. However, on the contrary, the clear answers and incisive arguments of ʿAlī were the cause of deep satisfaction and delight for the caliphs, who had succeeded the Prophet, and were seated in his place of authority.
4. Clarification of legal judgements. One of the most sensitive issues in ʿAlī's life was to deal with unprecedented events and problems, those which were not covered by any explicit instruction or proof-text (*naṣṣ*) in the Qur'an or in the sayings of the Prophet. In the absence of any companion of the Prophet such as ʿAlī – who was, according to the Prophet, the most knowledgeable person in the

community and the one most capable of making legal judgements and decisions – many questions which prevailed in this early period of Islam would have remained unanswered, and many problems unsolved.

It was precisely the emergence of such unprecedented circumstances and problems that necessitated the succession of an infallible Imam, akin to the Prophet, who had complete mastery over all the principles and details of Islam, and whose comprehensive knowledge would protect the *ummah* against undesirable tendencies, and erroneous actions, that is, ones based on conjecture and speculation and false analogies. According to all the companions of the Prophet, such a capability was bestowed on nobody but ʿAlī. Some of ʿAlī's judgements, and his original and fascinating way of interpreting and applying Qur'anic verses, can be found in historical sources and in collections of hadiths.[1]

5. Counsel to the caliphs. Whenever the caliphal authority was confronted with a dead-end in its effort to resolve certain political or other issues, ʿAlī was the sole reliable advisor to whom they had recourse for consultation. With his far-sighted wisdom, he was able to remove the obstacles from their path, and determine the appropriate solution for the problem. Some examples of this kind of advice are to be found in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and in certain history books.
6. The spiritual and moral training of disciples. A number of pure hearted and receptive disciples, whose souls were qualified for traversing the spiritual path, received the benefit of the guidance and spiritual authority of ʿAlī. Through the light of this guidance they were able to attain the summits of spiritual realisation; and that which was veiled from outward sight became clear to inward vision, to the eye of the heart.
7. Striving for the welfare of the poor. In this endeavour, ʿAlī went so far as to create, with his own hands, gardens and orchards for the poor; he also dug canals which he would then give as *waqf* (charitable trust) to the poor – all of this being an expression of his service to God.

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[1] See the work by the remarkable scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Shūshtarī, on this subject (which has been translated into Persian).

These were the principal activities which dominated this quarter-century of the Imam's life. Unfortunately, the eminent historians of Islam have not paid sufficient attention to this part of the Imam's life; the fine points and details of these activities were not recorded by them, while, by contrast, the lives of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs are covered so exhaustively that no minor details are omitted.

One must ask oneself: Is it not a great pity that these twenty-five years of his life have remained in obscurity, while the history of the unjust has been so carefully written – and by dishonest historians at that – such as the reports of even the immoral gatherings of Muʿāwiyah's progeny, Marwān, and (later) those of the Abbasid caliphs; reports presented with such great precision that even the poetry recited in their banquets, or verbatim discussions which took place between caliphs and poets and musicians, secrets divulged in the middle of the night, all of this has been recorded as part of Islamic history! Not only is this aspect of their lives covered with such care, there are minute, detailed accounts of dwellers on the outskirts of the cities, different types of workers, the number of servants the caliphs had, their flocks, the particular details of their wives' jewellery, the type of adornments in which they were bedecked, and so on and so forth. But when it comes to describing the life of the friends of God and the followers of the Truth – those very souls without whose sacrifices and selfless devotion, these later unworthy individuals would not have had any society or polity to rule over – it is as if their pens have been locked up, or, in the manner of hasty travellers, they seek quickly to reach the end of this chapter in the history of Islam.

Turning the First Leaf

The first leaf of this chapter in the Imam's life is the departure of the Prophet from the terrestrial realm. The Prophet passed away with his holy head resting on the bosom of ʿAlī. This is mentioned and commented upon by ʿAlī in one of his historic sermons:

> The Prophet's companions, guardians of the history of his life, remembered that never, even for a moment, had I disobeyed the commands of God and His messenger. In battle with enemies, while the heroes stepped backwards and escaped, I surrendered my life in the path of God's Messenger, without any hesitation. The soul of the

> Messenger of God departed from his body, while his head was resting on my hands and chest. To obtain blessings, I passed my hands over my face. Then I washed his body, with the help of the angels. Groups of angels, descending and ascending, performed the funeral prayer over the Prophet's body. I constantly heard their voices. This continued until we put him in his resting place. No one is closer to him, or more worthy of him, during his life or his death, than myself.[1]

With the passing away of the Prophet, some became immersed in silence and others acted behind veils of secrecy. The first incident to befall the Muslims after the death of the Prophet was ʿUmar's denial of the Prophet's death. He created a disturbance in front of the Prophet's house, threatening those who said that the Prophet had died. Although ʿAbbās and Ibn Umm Maktūm were reciting Qur'anic verses referring to the possibility of the Prophet's death, this had no impact upon him. It was only when his friend, Abū Bakr, arrived from the outskirts of Medina, and came to the house as soon as he became aware of what had happened, then recited a verse from the Qur'an – one which had already been recited by others – that ʿUmar calmed down and became silent.[2]

While ʿAlī and a group of companions were engaged with the ritual ablution (*ghusl*) of the pure body of the Prophet, and in making all due preparations for the shrouding of the body and the performance of the funeral prayer, discussions concerning the Prophet's successor had already started in the hall known as Saqīfah Banī Sāʿidah. The Helpers had taken the initiative and were in charge of affairs. When Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and Abū ʿUbaydah, who were among the Migrants, heard about what was happening, they left the group who were preparing the Prophet's body for the *ghusl*, and joined the gathering in the Saqīfah. The outcome of the heated arguments – and, possibly, violent clashes – was that Abū Bakr was elected by five votes as the caliph, despite the fact that none of the Migrants, except these three who were present, were aware of what had happened.[3]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Sermon 192.

[2] '*You will indeed die, and they* [*too*] *will die indeed*' (39:30).

[3] For further details regarding the event of the Saqīfah and how Abū Bakr attained the caliphate on the basis of five votes, see the works of the present writer, *Rahbarī-yi Ummat* and *Pishwā'ī dar Islām*. In these works the chaotic event is discussed in detail; what is given here is a short summary.

While ʿAlī was in the midst of the preparation for the Prophet's funeral, and the discussions at Saqīfah were taking place, Abū Sufyān came to ʿAlī's house. Abū Sufyān had an acute sense of political strategy, and he wished to sow the seeds of discord within the *ummah*. He thus said to ʿAlī: 'Give me your hand so that I can make a pledge of allegiance (*bayʿah*) to you; I take your hand as that of the caliph of the Muslims. If I swear allegiance to you no one from among the progeny of ʿAbd Manāf will oppose you; if the progeny of ʿAbd Manāf pledge allegiance to you, no one from the Quraysh would rise against you. Thus, all of the Arabs will recognise you as the caliph.'

ʿAlī was well aware of his evil intentions, so he responded in an indifferent manner, saying: 'At this moment, I am busy with the arrangements for the Prophet's funeral.'

Either at the same time as, or just prior to, the proposal of Abū Sufyān, ʿAbbās also sought to make the *bayʿah* with his nephew, ʿAlī, but again, the latter declined.

Not long after this, sounds of *Allāhu akbar* (God is Greatest) reached their ears. ʿAlī asked ʿAbbās what the reason for this was. He replied: 'Did I not tell you that others would try and overtake you in acquiring the *bayʿah*? Did I not ask you to give me your hand, so that I could make the *bayʿah* to you? But you refused, and now others have overtaken you.'

Were the Proposals of ʿAbbās and Abū Sufyān Realistic?

If ʿAlī had agreed to ʿAbbās' proposal immediately after the Prophet's passing away, and if he had invited a group of dignitaries to swear allegiance to him, there is no doubt that the gathering of Saqīfah either would not have taken place or else it would have broken up. For no one would have dared to suggest that an issue of such vital importance as the caliphate could be determined in a small place (Saqīfah), and by such a small group of people, with so few votes deciding who was to be the ruler of the Muslims after the Prophet.

Nonetheless, it is unrealistic to think that instead of referring to the general declaration made in public by the Prophet, a private pledge of allegiance to ʿAlī by a few people, in secret, would be effective. The judgement of history regarding such an allegiance would have been the same as it has been regarding that of Abū Bakr. There are two ways of looking at 'Alī's authority as leader: either he had been appointed and designated as leader of the Muslims by divine decree or he had not. If the former be true, then to seek the pledge of allegiance from the people would be completely unnecessary. Further, to appoint himself as a candidate for the caliphate in order to obtain the votes of the public would be tantamount to ignoring the divine 'appointment', an implicit denial of the principle that the office of the caliphate must be determined by God's decree, and a tacit acceptance of the principle that this office is to be determined by 'election'. On no account would a man of truth and good conscience – let alone an infallible Imam – attempt to distort the truth for the sake of worldly rank and status, or place a veil over the principal reality. Regarding the second supposition – that is, the election of 'Alī to the office of the caliphate – the result of this would be that 'Alī's accession to the caliphate would have acquired the same status as that of Abū Bakr's. As remarked by his closest friend, 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb, when he became the second caliph: 'The manner in which Abū Bakr's *bay'ah* was achieved was a *faltah* ('a hasty affair'), the evil of which was averted by God.'[1]

It is most important to understand that Abū Sufyān's proposal was based on nothing but bad intentions; his motive was solely to muddy the waters by creating divisions and conflict between Muslims, hoping that this would increase the likelihood of a reversion by the Arabs to the *jāhilī* period, and nip in the bud the newly founded Islamic polity. Abū Sufyān entered 'Alī's house singing his praises in the form of a poem. The following is the translation of two couplets of his poem:

> O progeny of Hāshim! Break silence, so that the people, especially the
> Taym and 'Adī tribes, avert their greedy eyes from your self-evident right.
>
> The caliphate belongs to you, and is directed to you; and none
> but Abū Ḥasan, 'Alī, is worthy of it.[2]

But 'Alī made a veiled allusion to his bad intention, saying in reply to his proposal: 'We have nothing to do with the affair that you are pursuing.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 205; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 4, p. 308.

[2] *Darajāt al-Rafī'ah*, p. 87.

Al-Ṭabarī wrote: "Alī rebuked him and said: "You have no other motive but revolt and intrigue. For a long time you have borne malice towards Islam. I have no need of your advice, your horsemen, or your footmen.""[1]

Abū Sufyān was fully aware of the Muslims' disagreement regarding the Prophet's successor; he evaluated it thus: 'I can see such a storm brewing that nothing but blood will be able to suppress it.'[2] His judgement was most accurate. Were it not for the self-sacrifice of the Banū Hāshim, such a stormy dispute would not have been resolved without violence and bloodshed.

A Vengeful Group

A great number of Arab tribes in the period of the *jāhiliyyah* had been notoriously vengeful and vindictive. We read in the history of *jāhilī* Arabs that little incidents become great events, because revenge and retaliation are never forgotten. It is true that under the guidance of Islam they were able, to some extent at least, to cease practising their *jāhilī* customs and to become regenerated through the spirit of Islam. Nonetheless, this tribal mentality had not been completely eradicated and uprooted, for this vengeful sentiment persisted at deeper levels of consciousness even after the advent of Islam, and it rose to the surface from time to time.

It is not surprising that a powerful figure among the Helpers, Ḥubāb ibn Mundhir, who supported the principle that the caliphate should be taken up by one of the Helpers, turned to 'Umar at the assembly in Saqīfah, and said: 'We will never oppose your caliphate or be jealous of you regarding it. But we are fearful lest it fall into the hands of those people whose sons, fathers, and brothers have been killed by us in battle-fields in our effort to wipe out polytheism and to spread Islam; because the Migrants' relatives were killed by the sons of the Helpers and our youth; if these men take over the leadership, our situation will definitely change for the worse.'

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes: 'In year 610 [1213 CE], I was studying the work entitled *Saqīfah* written by Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jawharī, under Ibn Abī Zayd, the *naqīb* (dignitary) of Basra. When the discussion reached the chapters related to Ḥubāb ibn Mundhir, my teacher said:

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[1] See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 45.

[2] Ibid., p. 44 quoting from al-Jawharī's *al-Saqīfah*.

'Ḥubāb made a very wise prediction, what he feared did indeed come to pass, in the form of Muslim ibn 'Aqabah's attack on Medina. This city was besieged, by order of Yazīd, and the Umayyads avenged the blood of those killed in the Battle of Badr from the descendants of the Helpers.' Then he continued: 'Whatever Ḥubāb predicted was foreseen by the Messenger too. He also feared for his own family, knowing as he did the vengefulness of certain Arab clans; he knew that many of their relatives' blood had been shed in the battlefields by the young men of Banū Hāshim. He was aware that were they to take hold of the reins of power, they would seek revenge by shedding the blood of the Prophet's family. For this reason, he continuously declared 'Alī as his heir and his successor as well as the leader of the *ummah*, believing that the granting of so high a position and status to the Prophet's family would surely safeguard the life of 'Alī and the Prophet's household...But what can one do? Destiny changed the course of events, power was taken by others, and the Prophet's declarations and warnings went unheeded. That which was not supposed to happen did happen – and so much of the pure blood of his descendants was spilt!'[1]

However, from the Shi'a point of view, the *naqīb* of Basra's point of view is incorrect. For we believe that the Messenger appointed 'Alī as the leader of the *ummah* following the direct order of God; and that the appointment of 'Alī was not based on a desire to protect his life and the lives of the family of the Prophet, but rather he was appointed leader because of his intrinsic worth – on account of which the very position of leadership was itself established. Nevertheless, in another respect, his analysis is completely correct. If 'Alī and his descendants had held power, the tragedy of Karbalā' and slaughtering of his progeny by the murderous Umayyads and Abbasids would never have taken place, and those so-called Muslims would never dared to have martyred members of the household (*ahl al-bayt*).

A Meaningful Silence

Doubtless, the Messenger's passing away confronted Islamic society and the Prophet's family with an intense crisis. There was always fear that the fire of civil war among the Muslims over the issue of the caliphate and state power may be ignited, and that the eventual result would be the disintegration of Islamic society and the return of the newly converted Arab tribes to the idolatry of the *jāhiliyyah* period.

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[1] Ibid., p. 53.

The Islamic movement was as yet still in its early stages; it had not yet penetrated and taken deep root in people's hearts, so that the majority were not sufficiently receptive to the new faith to be able to orient themselves to it with all their being.

'Alī, together with many of the faithful companions of the Prophet, had not yet completed the funeral rites and burial of the Prophet before two groups of companions started creating a commotion, each claiming the caliphate for themselves. The two groups were as follows.

1. The Helpers, especially from the Khazraj tribe, who had gathered together before the Migrants in the meeting hall called Saqīfah Banī Sā'idah. They had decided to offer the leadership to their chief, Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah, so that he should become the Prophet's successor. But due to lack of agreement between different clans among the Helpers, and also because age-old tribal animosity – particularly between the tribes of Aws and Khazraj – could not be forgotten, the Helpers as a whole fell into internal dispute. The Aws were opposed to the leadership of the Khazrajī chief, Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah. Not only did the representatives of the Aws refuse to support Sa'd, they even insisted that only one of the Migrants should become the new leader and caliph.
2. The Migrants, and at their head, Abū Bakr and his like-minded companions. This group, although constituting a small minority in the Saqīfah assembly, as already mentioned, managed to garner the votes and sentiments in such a way that Abū Bakr was elected as caliph, and they left the hall as victors. On the way to the Prophet's mosque, they managed to obtain more supporters and followers. Abū Bakr, then, assumed the title of *khalīfatu rasūl Allāh*, and mounted the Prophet's pulpit and invited the people to come and pledge their allegiance to him.

The Third Group and the Issue of the Caliphate

Confronting the two mentioned groups, there existed a third, a group which was endowed with great spiritual power. This group consisted of 'Alī, the leading figures of the Banū Hāshim, and a number of sincere followers of Islam, who were firm in the belief that ʿAlī was the rightful caliph and was, from every point of view, the most qualified person to be leader of the Muslim community.

This group observed that the funeral rites of their beloved prophet had hardly been completed before the two groups, the Migrants and the Helpers, were fighting among themselves for the caliphate. This third group took sanctuary in the house of Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, avoiding the assemblies of the other groups, doing so in order to express their opposition, not only to the Migrants and the Helpers, but also to all Muslims, making it known that they believed Abū Bakr's assumption of the caliphate to be unlawful, as it violated the explicit designation of the Prophet, and was moreover contrary to the principle of consultation (*shūrā*). However, this group of opponents to the caliphate were compelled to leave the sanctuary of the house of the Prophet's daughter and to go instead to the Prophet's mosque.

In such a situation, a grave responsibility was placed on the shoulders of this third group. It was exceptionally difficult for ʿAlī, witnessing as he did the departure of the Islamic caliphate from right leadership, and knowing that many further deviations would follow. Then ʿAlī decided that if he kept silent and made no comment, that would be seen to constitute an implicit approval of the improper action, and thus contribute to its legality. Silence, on the part of so great a personage as ʿAlī, might be taken, both by the people of his time and by future generations, as a sign of consent and legitimation of the pretender's claim to the caliphate. Therefore, he broke the seal of silence and performed his first and foremost duty – reminding people of the Truth – by means of a sermon in the Prophet's mosque, where his allegiance was being forcefully sought. He addressed the Migrants thus:

> O party from the Migrants! Do not deviate from a government, the foundations of which were laid by the Messenger himself, taking it away from his lineage to your own homes. I swear to God that the Prophet's family is far more qualified for this task, because among them, there is a person with comprehensive knowledge of the Qur'an, who has mastery over the principles (*uṣūl*) of religion and their detailed applications (*furūʿ*); who is fully cognizant of the prophetic modes of conduct (*sunan*); and who is fully capable of governing Islamic society, controlling

> corruption, and equitably distributing the wealth of the community. With such a person present, no one else should be given this position [of leader]. Beware lest you follow your own desires in this affair, and thus stray from the path of God, becoming far removed from the Truth.[1]

To substantiate his right to the caliphate, ʿAlī referred in this speech to his extensive knowledge of the divine book, the prophetic tradition, and his spiritual authority, by means of which he would be qualified to govern Muslim society with perfect justice. He also referred to his kinship with the Prophet, doing so as an implicit counter-argument to that of the Migrants, who, in asserting their claim to the caliphate employed, among other arguments, their own proximity to the Prophet.

According to the Shiʿa hadiths, ʿAlī went to Abū Bakr, accompanied by a group among the Banū Hāshim, and reiterated his right to the caliphate, stressing his knowledge of the divine book, prophetic tradition, his precedence over others in Islam, his steadfastness in jihad, his eloquence in speech, and his spiritual courage, proffering these factors as so many arguments in support of his claim:

> During the Prophet's lifetime, I was the most worthy of his station and rank, and remain so after his death. I am his *waṣī*, his *wazīr*, the keeper of his secrets, and the treasure house of his knowledge. I am *al-ṣiddīq al-akbar* (the greatest friend) and *al-farūq al-aʿzam* (the most tremendous discerner). I was the first person to believe in him, and the first who bore witness to the truth of his message. Among you, I am the most steadfast in jihad against the idolaters, the most learned in respect of the divine book and the Messenger's tradition (*sunnah*), possessing the most comprehensive knowledge of the principles (*uṣūl*) of religion and their details (*furūʿ*). In eloquence, I surpass all of you, and the firmest of you in confronting difficulties. On what basis can you dispute with me about this legacy?[2]

In one of his sermons, ʿAlī refers to the caliphate as a position which was properly reserved for the most able person in managing state affairs and the wisest as regards divine injunctions:

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 11.

[2] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 95.

> O people! The most qualified person to rule is the one most able to govern affairs, and the one who knows most about the divine injunctions. If a person is not qualified in all these respects, and he starts to think about [assuming] the caliphate, he will be asked to strain his neck for justice, and if he continues in his corruption, he shall be killed.[1]

This was not only ʿAlī's reasoning; some of his opponents occasionally expressed themselves with objectivity, openly acknowledging his right to the caliphate, and confessing that in giving preference to someone else over him, they were violating his right. When Abū ʿUbaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ learned about ʿAlī's refusal to pay allegiance to Abū Bakr, he turned to ʿAlī and said: 'Render the caliphate to Abū Bakr. If you are given a long life, you will be more worthy than anyone else to assume the caliphate, because your sublime virtues, strong faith, comprehensive knowledge, profound insight, precedence in Islam, and your kinship with the Prophet, as both his cousin and his son-in-law, are well-known facts to all.'[2]

In order to reclaim his right, ʿAlī did not simply resort to advice and reminders. According to a number of historians, he visited certain leaders among the Helpers in an effort to divert the caliphate back to its rightful owner; on some evenings, he went in the company of Fāṭimah and their precious sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Regrettably, he received no positive response from them. The invalid excuse proffered by the Helpers was that if ʿAlī had thought about the caliphate earlier, and sought their *bayʿah* before others had done so, they would never have abandoned him by pledging their *bayʿah* to another person.

In response to their excuse, ʿAlī said: 'Was it correct to abandon the Prophet's body in the corner of the house and concentrate on the caliphate and seek people's *bayʿah*?' Confirming ʿAlī's words, the Prophet's daughter added: "Alī knows his duty better than anyone else. God will call this group to account for having denied ʿAlī his right.'[3]

Thus, it was through reminding people of his right, proffering all appropriate arguments, and appealing to the leaders of the Helpers for assistance, that constituted ʿAlī's initial attempt to reclaim his right in opposition to those who had taken it from him. However, the historical record shows that 'Alī's efforts were of no avail, and his right was violated. At this point, the following questions arise: under such critical and tense circumstances, what did 'Alī's duty consist of? Was it to watch in silence or stand up and fight?

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Sermon 168.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 12.

[3] Ibid.; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 47, quoted from Muʿāwiyah's letter.

Only One Way for the Imam

In the Prophet's mosque, in front of a group of the Migrants and the Helpers, 'Alī had clarified the reality of the situation, and established his indisputable arguments and proofs for all the Muslims. However, the caliph and his supporters insisted on usurping the caliphate and expanding the scope of the new caliph's authority. The passage of time ran counter to the Imam, and served to entrench the newly established authorities, as more and more people gradually became accustomed to the existing status quo. The new government was winning over the hearts and minds of the populace.

In such a sensitive situation, every moment that elapsed was to the detriment of the Prophet's family, and to the benefit of the newly established government; what was 'Alī's duty? As mentioned above, there were only two options open to him: either to rise up and fight for his usurped right, with the support of the eminent figures among the Banū Hāshim and his true and sincere followers; or to remain silent and retire from the social and political scene, concentrating instead on his own personal responsibilities in the domain of ethical and spiritual guidance.

All the signs and indications – as will be clear from what follows – pointed to the fact that an uprising on the part of the Imam, in such situation, would have not been to the benefit of the young religion of Islam, and the newly founded society of Muslims. Consequently, the Imam opted of necessity for the second path.

The Prophet's Fear of the *Ummah*'s Apostasy (*Irtidād*)

Certain Qur'anic verses indicate that the Prophet, by observing a chain of unpleasant events during his life, had a particular fear about the future of the Muslim society: that of apostasy. His main concern was that after his death, groups of Muslims may revert to the paganism of the *jāhiliyyah* period prior to the advent of Islam, and abandon the new religion that had been revealed to them from God.

This fear appears to have taken root in the mind of the Prophet during the Battle of Uḥud, when the enemy's rumour – that the Prophet had been killed – spread through the ranks of the Muslims; the Prophet witnessed with his own eyes the spectacle of most – nearly all – of the Muslims fleeing for their lives, taking refuge in the mountains and far-flung places. As noted earlier, others even tried to contact the leader of the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*), 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, in order to use his mediation to obtain a pledge of security from Abū Sufyān. Their faith and religious beliefs were so weak and superficial that they even entertained suspicions about God and conceived erroneous beliefs about Him. The Qur'an reveals their secrets thus: '*...while another group, anxious only about themselves, entertained false notions about God, notions of* [*pagan*] *ignorance. They say, "Do we have any role in the matter?"*' (3:154).

There is another verse in the Qur'an implicitly stating the possibility of division between the Muslims after the Prophet's death: '*Muḥammad is but a messenger;* [*other*] *messengers have passed before him. If he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels? Anyone who turns back on his heels will not harm God in the least, and soon God will reward the grateful*' (3:144).

This verse divides the Messenger's companions into two groups: those who may 'turn back on their heels' and 'those who serve God with gratitude', implying the possibility of division and conflict between Muslims after the Prophet's passing away.

An analysis of the assembly at Saqīfah Banī Sā'idah shows obviously how on that day secrets were unveiled. Tribal prejudices, along with *jāhilī* thoughts, once again manifested themselves during the debates between the Muslims. It became clear that the Islamic mentality had not penetrated deeply into the hearts of a significant group among the Muslims.

Evaluation of the historical evidence relating to this assembly, by means of scrutiny of the speeches made, discloses that the objective of that gathering was essentially personal interest. Each party was vying for the mantle of the caliphate – that mantle which ought to have been bestowed upon the most worthy person in the *ummah*. In that gathering, the least important issue was what best served the interest of Islam and the Muslims, the need to ensure that power was bestowed upon the most righteous person in the community, one who would navigate the vessel of

Islam to the shores of salvation, by means of his wisdom, magnanimity, and virtue.

In such a grievous state of affairs, with Muslims still prey to the old pagan mentality, and in which the faith of Islam had not fully penetrated the hearts of so many Muslims, any kind of internal divisions or worse, civil war, would in all likelihood create the kind of social disintegration which would lead many to revert to pagan idolatry.

The most glaring piece of evidence is ʿAlī's speech at the start of the events of Saqīfah. In his speech, ʿAlī emphasised the importance of Islamic unity and warned of the catastrophic outcome of conflict and friction. For example, when Abū Sufyān sought to give his *bayʿah* to ʿAlī, in order to realise his nefarious intentions, ʿAlī turned to the people and said:

> Cleave the waves of disturbance with the ships of salvation. Avoid division, conflict and boasting...If I speak up, they say he is greedy for power, if I keep silent, they say he is afraid of death. I swear to almighty God, the son of Abū Ṭālib is more intimate with death than is the babe with his mother's breast. If I keep quiet, it is due to my deep knowledge. If you had such knowledge as mine, then you would tremble like a rope in the deepest of wells.[1]

The knowledge of which ʿAlī was speaking was precisely his awareness of the devastating consequences of conflict and division. ʿAlī was fully conscious that revolt and civil war would result in the effacement of Islam, and the complete reversion of the people to paganism.

The spread of the news of the Prophet's death among the newly converted Muslim tribes encouraged some of them to rise in revolt and raise the banner of apostasy (*irtidād*), seeking to return to their ancestral pagan faith. These tribes rebelled against the central government, refusing to pay their religious tax. The central government's initial response was to mobilise a group of steadfast and dedicated Muslims to combat the apostates, in an effort to make them return to Islam, abide by the laws of the government, and adhere to all the injunctions of Islam. This strong response was intended to deter all other tribes – who, to a greater or lesser degree, were already thinking of apostatising and reverting to paganism – from following the example of the apostates.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 5.

Apart from the apostasy of some tribes, another kind of disturbance occurred, this time in Yamāmah, where some pseudo-prophets, such as Musaylamah, Sajjāḥ and Ṭulayḥah appeared and claimed to have received revelations.

Under such circumstances, with the outlying tribes raising aloft the banner of apostasy, the pseudo-prophets in the provinces of Najd and Yamāmah, and without unity among the Migrants and the Helpers, it was hardly appropriate for ʿAlī to raise up yet another banner and fight for his right. In one of his letters to the people of Egypt, ʿAlī referred to this as follows:

> I swear by God, I never thought that Arabs would take away the caliphate from the Prophet's family or prevent me from taking up the caliphate. I was never so astonished as I was by seeing the pledge of allegiance being given by the people to another person. But I held back. I saw that a group of people apostatised from Islam, seeking to destroy the religion of Muḥammad. I feared that if I did not hasten to assist Islam and the Muslims, corruption and destruction would afflict the body of Islam. I knew that such a calamity and disaster would be of far greater magnitude than the issue of acquiring power for a few days, which, like a mirage or a momentary passing cloud, will vanish. So, I stood up to confront these apostates and assisted the Muslims until falsehood was effaced and peace returned to Islam.[1]

Before the start of ʿUthmān's caliphate, when the council for the election of the caliph voted for him to be caliph, ʿAlī addressed the council in the following words:

> You all know that I am more deserving of the caliphate than anyone else. But as long as the affairs of the Muslim are being governed correctly, I am prepared to abstain from taking it up, however much I may be treated unjustly. If I manifest reluctance in regard to governing, it is due to my perception of the spiritual rewards and benefits of this way [which I have chosen].[2]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes:

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Letter 62.

[2] Ibid., Sermon 71.

> One day during the Imam's period of seclusion from society, when he had opted to refrain from [political] action, his beloved wife, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', tried to persuade him to rise up and fight to reclaim his right. At that very moment a *mu'adhdhin* was making the call to prayer, saying: 'I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God'. 'Alī turned to his wife and said: 'Do you wish to silence this voice on earth?' Fāṭimah replied: 'Never'. 'Alī continued: 'Then the way which I have chosen is the right one.'[1]

Due to the importance of this issue, we will continue our discussion on the probable consequences that would have been entailed by 'Alī's uprising, doing so on the basis of reliable and strongly authenticated sources.

The Value of the Supreme Goal

Only a few issues in society attain the same degree of importance as that of political leadership. A rare combination of precise and demanding qualities is necessary in order to be the leader of a great nation, such that in any generation only a handful of individuals can ever be expected to possess them. Among all the different types of leadership that are to be found in human society, spiritual leadership over a society governed by a revealed religion entails responsibilities of a far greater magnitude and gravity than, for example, those which will be expected by a leadership elected by the people.

In respect of spiritual leadership, the objective is realisation of a goal which transcends the aim of simply preserving one's status and position. In a complex situation where there is no other option than to choose one particular path and neglect another, preference will be given by the spiritual leader to whatever best serves the interests of the fundamental principles of the religion and the transcendent goal. Thus, he will willingly sacrifice his own external position and power, knowing that this is far less important than the sacred aspiration which defines the very purpose of human life.

After the Prophet's passing away, 'Alī was confronted with just such a dilemma. The central aim of his leadership was to nurture and protect the seed planted by the Prophet in the land of Hejaz, so that, with the passage of time, a bountiful tree might spring up, with its branches spreading all over the world, and beneath the shade of which mankind might partake of the fruits of its blessings.

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[1] See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 11, p. 113.

After the Prophet's death, the Imam realised that were he to insist on his right and seize by force the leadership of the community, this would have entailed the loss of all the efforts of the Prophet, and the waste of all the noble blood that was shed for the sake of his noble cause.

Ingrained Animosities

Islamic society in that period was so internally diversified as regards opinions and views, that even a minor degree of internal conflict or bloodshed might have led to a violent explosion, both inside and outside Medina. Many tribes both within and beyond Medina and outside were intensely ill disposed to ʿAlī, because it was he who had humiliated their heroes and destroyed the banners of unbelief. Although later on their ties with the formal faith of Islam became stronger, in that they made a show of adhering outwardly to Islamic precepts and worshipping God alone, nonetheless, they retained a secret hatred for the warriors of Islam.

In such circumstances, if ʿAlī had chosen to fight for his right, the following consequences could have been envisaged.

1. In this battle a large number of his companions, who believed sincerely in his imamate and leadership, would lose their lives. Of course, if it were assumed that, as a result of their martyrdom, the Imam's right would be regained, such sacrifices would have been acceptable. However, this could not be assumed, as will be shown below.
2. Not only would ʿAlī lose his sincere companions, but an uprising by the Banū Hāshim would also have meant that many of the Messenger's companions, who were dissatisfied with ʿAlī's caliphate, would also die. Consequently, the very foundations of the central authority of Islam would have been weakened. It should be stressed that many in this group had no disagreement with the Imam except as regards the question of his leadership; they thus formed part of the barrier against the incursions of the disbelievers, as well as the Jews and Christians.

3. As a result of the weakening of the central body politic of Islam, many far-flung tribes, lacking any strong roots in Islam, would have been greatly encouraged to join the opponents of the Muslims, forming a common front with them. Hence, in the absence of a strong central authority, the light of *tawḥīd* could be extinguished.

Such bitter and painful realities compelled the Imam to choose silence over combat. It is best to let the Imam speak for himself on this question.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Junādah narrates:

> It was during the initial days of ʿAlī's leadership [as the fourth caliph], when I arrived in Medina from Mecca. I saw the people gathering in the Prophet's mosque, awaiting the arrival of ʿAlī. After a while he came out of his house, carrying his sword; all eyes were fixed on him until he sat in the place set up for preaching. After praising God, he said: 'O people, be aware, after the passing away of the Prophet, it was imperative that no one should have any quarrel regarding our leadership, the foundation of which was laid by the Prophet, nor cast any greedy eye on our right. For we were appointed as his heir (*wārith*), his *walī*, and we are part of his family. However, contrary to our expectations, a group of the Quraysh took our rights and usurped our caliphate. I swear by God, were it not out of fear of conflict and discord among the Muslims, and the danger of the loss of Muslim lands to idolatry, and the destruction and annihilation of Islam, our situation would have been contrary to what you are witnessing.'[1]

According to al-Kalbī: 'While ʿAlī was travelling towards Basra to suppress the uprising of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, he delivered this sermon:

> When the Almighty took the Prophet's soul, the Quraysh selfishly preferred themselves to us, and denied us our rights. However, I realised that patience and forbearance was better than creating disunity among the Muslims and shedding their blood. For the people had only recently embraced Islam; the newly established religion was like a jug full of foaming milk: with even a little impurity, it would turn sour, or else be overturned by just one person.[2]

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[1] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 307.

[2] Ibid., vol. 8, p. 30.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, who had great affection for ʿAlī and disliked the caliphs, describes as follows the deep-rooted animosity towards ʿAlī on the part of a group of companions:

> Experience shows that with the passage of time animosity is forgotten, the flame of envy is extinguished, and hearts fired up with anger turn cool. The passage of time causes one generation to die and another generation to succeed it. Consequently, any animosity inherited by the new generation from the old one becomes diluted. On the day that ʿAlī assumed the caliphate, twenty-five years had elapsed since the Prophet's passing away. It might have been expected that after such a long period old animosities and hostilities would have been forgotten. But on the contrary, the opposition to ʿAlī had not diminished on the part of a group of companions, and they bore the same ill will towards him as they had during the time of the Prophet, and after his death, despite the fact that a quarter of a century had elapsed since that time. Even the children of the Quraysh, the new generation who had not witnessed the bloody events that took place on the battlefields of early Islam, or ʿAlī's courageous combat against the Quraysh in such battles as those of Badr and Uḥud, manifested hatred to ʿAlī. They opposed him with anger just as their fathers had done, and with hearts filled with desire for revenge... If the situation were thus at this stage, then one can see how, if ʿAlī had assumed the caliphate after the Prophet's death and established his rule over the Muslims, the fire in the hearts of these people would have been ignited, together with such explosions that the end result would be the destruction of Islam, the annihilation of the Muslims, and the return of the age of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).[1]

In one of his sermons, ʿAlī referred to the probable consequences that would flow from his initiating an uprising to regain his usurped rights:

> After the death of the Prophet, I reflected upon what I should do. I saw that I had no supporters apart from my family. I did not wish to see them killed, so I closed my eyes that had splinters in them, and drank while there was a bone in the throat, and patiently swallowed my anger though it was more bitter than poison.[2]

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[1] Ibid., vol. 11, p. 114 (commenting on Sermon 311).

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Sermon 62; a similar discourse is given in Sermon 212.

Muslim Unity

Muslim unity was one of the highest aims and priorities for Imam ʿAlī. He was fully aware that in the Prophet's day it was this unity that struck fear and awe into the hearts of world empires and great powers, and which assisted the astonishingly rapid spread of Islam. Any conflict over the issue of leadership could damage this unity beyond repair. Furthermore, a group of Quraysh who were ostensibly Muslim were waiting for the opportune moment to impart a death blow to the body of Islam.

Among the Migrants, there were challengers like Suhayl ibn ʿAmr, Ḥārith ibn Hishām, ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl and so forth. For a long time, these people were enemies of the Muslims and of the Helpers in particular. Nevertheless, for some reason, they outwardly abandoned idolatry and formally adopted Islam. After their defeat at the assembly at Saqīfah, the Helpers emerged in support of ʿAlī, calling upon people to follow him; at this time, the aforementioned persons became extremely dissatisfied, appealing to the caliphal authorities to call the Khazraj tribe of the Helpers to make the *bayʿah* to the caliph, and, should they refuse, to fight them.

In a huge gathering each one of the persons mentioned above gave a speech, and Abū Sufyān joined them too! In response to them, one of the Helpers, by the name of Thābit ibn Qays, criticised the Migrants and brought arguments against them. The battle between the Helpers and the Migrants – taking the form of poetry and oratory – continued for a considerable period of time. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd makes reference to this in his commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*.[1]

Taking into consideration these circumstances, the reasons why the Imam chose silence over fighting are absolutely clear. One can see how with his wisdom and farsightedness he navigated the battered vessel of Islam to the shores of salvation. Were it not for his love of the unity of Islam, and his clear perception of the consequences of conflict among the Muslims, he would never have allowed others to take from him the position of leadership.

When the events were unfolding in Saqīfah, one of ʿAlī's relatives eulogised him in a poem:

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, pp. 23–45.

I never believed that the leadership of the *ummah* would be denied
to the clan of Banū Hāshim, or to Imam Abū al-Ḥasan.
Was not ʿAlī the first person to pray in the direction of your *qibla*?
Is he not the most knowledgeable among you regarding the Qur'an
and the Messenger's tradition (*sunnah*)?
Was he not the nearest person to the Prophet? Did Gabriel not assist
him in preparing the body of the Prophet for burial?[1]

When ʿAlī was informed about such poetry, he dispatched a messenger telling him to stop this kind of recitation, saying: 'The welfare of religion is more lovable to us than anything other than it'.

In the Battle of Ṣiffīn, a man from the Banū Asad tribe asked ʿAlī: 'In what circumstances did the Quraysh remove you from the caliphate?' ʿAlī was upset by this inappropriate question, for a section of his supporters in the army believed in the rectitude of the first three caliphs, and the posing of such a question could have created division in the ranks. After expressing his displeasure to the questioner, ʿAlī said:

> Out of respect for your relationship with the Prophet, and on account of the fact that every Muslim has the right to ask questions, I will give you a brief answer. The leadership of the *ummah* belonged to us by right, and our relationship with the Messenger was stronger than that of anybody else. But some became miserly regarding it; and others cast a veil over it. God will judge between us and them, and all things will return to Him.[2]

These were some of the reasons why the Imam remained silent, and why, for the sake of the preservation of the foundations of Islam, he chose to forgo his right, and thus to imbibe a drink more bitter than poison for twenty-five years of his life.

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 157.

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The Rule of the Caliphs and the Logic of the Imam

A number of Sunni scholars who have written commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* have addressed the subject of the Imam's claims regarding his superior right to the caliphate. Most of them conclude that his intention in so doing was only to affirm his greater merits in regard to leadership, and that there was no explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) by the Prophet as regards his becoming caliph. In other words, they argue that ʿAlī had a very close connection to the Prophet through kinship and spiritual proximity, and that his knowledge, wisdom, and statesmanship were more elevated than those of the other companions of the Prophet, so it was appropriate for the *ummah* to elect ʿAlī for the caliphate. However, the leading figures of the *ummah* chose another person instead; consequently, ʿAlī complained of injustice and said: 'I am more worthy of the caliphate and of political leadership (*wilāyah*) than the others!'

They further argue that the right mentioned by ʿAlī as having been denied to him from the time the Prophet died was not a legal (*sharʿī*) right, bestowed upon him by the Prophet as dispenser of the law – such that violating this right ran counter to a clear injunction of the law promulgated by the Prophet – but was in fact a natural right. In other words, those responsible for the election of the caliph should have opted for the person most qualified in terms of knowledge, spirituality, power, and all relevant pre-requisites for leadership. These commentators thus argue that when the most qualified person was passed over, and leadership was given to someone less qualified, it is altogether natural that the person passed over should complain. They see it as quite justified for the superior person to say: 'I swear to God, from the day the Lord took the soul of the Prophet to this day, I have been deprived of my right.'[1]

This saying of the Imam was uttered when Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had adopted Basra as their base, and were preparing their rebellion against him.

This assessment, which Sunni scholars present as an argument, is nothing but conjecture. It is impossible to regard all the sayings of the Imam as expressions of personal superiority; the intensity of his criticisms of the caliphs cannot be accounted for on the basis of a merely personal merit and right. Firstly, in some of his utterances he refers explicitly to the Prophet's legacy. When describing, for example, the family of the Prophet he said:

> They are the trustees of God's secret, the shelter for His affairs, the source of knowledge about Him, the centre of His wisdom, the treasuries of His books, and the mountains of His religion. None in the Islamic community can be compared with the family of Muḥammad. They are the foundation of the faith and the pillars of certainty. The one who goes too far must return to them, and the one who follows cleaves to them. To them belong the special features of the *wilāyah* (vicegerency), to them pertain the *waṣiyyah* (testament), and the *wirāthah* (inheritance).[2]

What does the Imam mean when he refers to the *waṣiyyah* of the Prophet as pertaining to his family? Taking into account the reference here to *wilāyah*, it becomes clear that the testament in question concerns authority and leadership, thus, it refers to their right to the caliphate, a designation explicitly made at Ghadīr and on other occasions.

Secondly, personal merits and worthiness do not translate into a right in the absence of other conditions, such as the election of the people. However, one observes that 'Alī emphatically declared in his speeches that his rights were absolute, and not conditional, and that these rights were violated after the Prophet's death. If the issue of the leadership of the *ummah* were to be decided on the basis of popular election, then it would be unreasonable for one person – even if he believes himself to be the most worthy candidate – to claim to possess a right to lead; nor can he claim that the people's decision to choose another person instead of him constituted a violation of that right and an act of injustice against him; nor can he complain to the person selected as leader. The sermons of the Imam all show that he claimed all these things, and thus could only have done so on the basis of his belief that he did possess this clear and explicit right of leadership, one which was violated by the people. He refers to the Quraysh as having perpetrated an injustice against him as follows: 'O God! Help me against the Quraysh and against those who aided them. For they have cut my kinship ties, and accounted my position insignificant, collaborating together to dispute with me over the caliphate, to which I have an evident right.'[1]

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 5.

[2] Ibid., Sermon 2.

Is it conceivable that such harsh words should be uttered purely on the grounds of personal merit? If the issue of the caliphate were to be resolved by referring to popular opinion, or by consultation among the senior companions, why would the Imam have said that the Quraysh were '...collaborating together to dispute with me over the caliphate, to which I have an evident right'?

When war had broken out between the Imam and Muʿāwiyah at Ṣiffīn, a man approached the Imam and asked: 'Why did the Quraysh withhold the caliphate from you, despite the fact that you were the most worthy of it?' The Imam, although somewhat put out by such a question at such an inappropriate time, answered gently – much more than the situation might have warranted – as follows: 'A group became greedy for it, and another ignored it, so God will decide between us and them; and all things return to Him.'[2]

In the aftermath of the assembly at Saqīfah, Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ said this to the Imam: 'O son of Abū Ṭalib, how greedily you covet the caliphate!' The Imam replied: 'By God, your greed for the caliphate is greater than mine, despite the fact that your rank is so far from it, while mine is so much closer to it. I seek but my right, while you seek to come between me and it, preventing me from attaining it.'[3]

It is completely incorrect to regard this kind of statement of the Imam and his criticisms of the caliphs as being based on something so contingent as personal merit. All of these discourses indicate clearly that the

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 167.

[2] Ibid., Sermon 175.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 167.

Imam believed that he had an objective right to become the successor, and that any kind of deviation from him was a deviation from that right. A right of this nature can only be one which had been explicitly designated and determined by divine decree.

Those people who interpret the Imam's statements as being based on his own precedence and merit have simply allowed their own religious doctrines to take the form of prejudices. Of course, the Imam did make statements underscoring his personal merits and worthiness, in which the principle of his designation is not mentioned, for example:

> The soul of the Messenger of God departed from his body, while his head was resting on my hands and chest, his soul departed. To obtain blessings, I passed my hands over my face. Then I washed his body, with the help of the angels. Groups of angels, descending and ascending, performed the funeral prayer over the Prophet's body. I constantly heard their voices...So, who is closer to him – in life or in death – or more worthy of succeeding him, than myself?[1]

In one of the Imam's well-known sermons, the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon, he reasserts his merits and says: 'By God, the son of Abī Quḥāfah [Abū Bakr] donned the garb [of the caliphate], whereas he knew that my position in relation to it was that of an axle to the hand mill. A flood pours down from me, no bird flies up to me...'[2]

In some of his statements the Imam also stresses his proximity and kinship with the Prophet: 'Our lineage is higher and we have closer kinship ties with the Messenger of God.'[3] This emphasis on his proximity to the Prophet is to be seen in the light of the logic employed by the Quraysh at the Saqīfah assembly: they used their proximity to the Prophet as the basis for claiming their right to the caliphate. Thus, when the Imam heard their argument, he said: 'They take the tree as their proof, but ignore its fruits!' (*iḥtajjū bil-shajarah wa aḍāʿū al-thamarah*).[4]

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 192.

[2] Ibid., Sermon 3.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 157.

[4] Ibid., Sermon 64.

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How Allegiance was sought from ʿAlī

This part of Islamic history is so painful and bitter that it wounds and burns all awakened hearts and sensitive souls. This period, however, has been abridged and condensed by Sunni scholars, but elaborated upon by Shiʿa scholars. It is possible some of our readers would like to learn from Sunni historians and traditionists about the incident of the trespassing on the house of revelation. Therefore, we shall rely in this chapter on Sunni sources, so that the sceptics may come to believe in the veracity of this bitter event. Our main source will be the work entitled *al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* by the famous historian Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī. We shall translate relevant portions of this book in this chapter, leaving until later a detailed analysis of this event.

There is a consensus of opinion among Sunni writers that it was not long after the alleigance pledged at Saqīfah that the new caliphal authority decided to try to obtain the alleigance for Abū Bakr from ʿAlī, ʿAbbās, Zubayr, and other members of the Banū Hāshim, so that the caliphate would appear to have a united front, and there would be no obstacle or impediment in the path of the new authority.

After the Saqīfah episode, a group of Migrants, members of the Banū Hāshim clan, and some supporters of ʿAlī took sanctuary in the house of Fāṭimah as a sign of discontent. At the time of the Prophet, Fāṭimah's house was treated with great reverence, such that the idea of attacking this house and dragging those taking refuge therein to the mosque in order to force them to swear allegiance would have hardly been conceivable to those within the new ruling apparatus. However, eventually, the desire for power took effect and caused the reverence for the house of revelation to be ignored.

The caliph sent 'Umar with a group of supporters to march towards Fāṭimah's house and, at any cost, to bring out those taking refuge in it, and have them proffer their alleigance. 'Umar was accompanied by such persons as Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr, Salamah ibn Sallāmah, Thābit ibn Qays, and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah.[1] They advanced towards the residence of Fāṭimah. In front of the house they called out with a loud voice, telling those who had taken sanctuary therein to leave the house and to swear their allegiance to the caliph. If they did not do so, they would be forced to come out. The threat went unheeded and the occupants remained in the house. So, the caliph's agent demanded that a pile of firewood be brought in order to burn the house. But one of his companions objected, saying to the caliph's agent: 'How can you burn the house while the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭimah, is inside?' The reply was: 'The fact that Fāṭimah is in the house cannot prevent this task from being carried out.'

At this time, Fāṭimah stood behind the door and said: 'I have not found people in such a bad state as yours. You left the Prophet's body among us and went off taking your own decision regarding the caliphate. Why are you trying to impose your rule over us, while you should be returning the caliphate to us, its rightful owners?'

Ibn Qutaybah writes:

> This time the caliphate's agent dismissed the idea of forcefully expelling the objectors, and returned to the caliph, informing him about the incident. The caliph was fully aware that without the approval of such eminent personalities among the Migrants and the Banū Hāshim, his authority could not be firmly established. This time the caliph sent his servant, Qunfudh, to take 'Alī to the mosque. Qunfudh stood behind the door and called 'Alī, and said: 'By the command of the successor of the Messenger of God, you must come to the mosque'. When 'Alī heard this from Qunfudh, he replied: 'How soon you have attributed such lies to the Messenger of God! When did the Messenger appoint him as his successor, such that he has now become the successor of the Messenger of God?' The disappointed servant returned and informed the caliph about his unsuccessful mission. This rebuttal of his repeated attempts

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 50.

> infuriated the caliph. Consequently, for the second time, 'Umar with the group proceeded towards Fāṭimah's house. When the Prophet's daughter heard the voices from behind the door, she lamented loudly, crying out: 'O my beloved father, the Messenger of God, after your departure, how we have been confronted with tribulations from the son of Khaṭṭāb and the son of Abū Quḥāfah.'

The heart-rending lamentations of Fāṭimah were so painful that many of 'Umar's men refused to attack her house, and, tearfully, they left the scene. However, 'Umar and another group persisted in the effort to obtain the allegiance of 'Alī and the Banū Hāshim. So, 'Alī was forced to go to the mosque where his pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr was demanded. 'Alī asked: 'What will you do if I refuse to give my allegiance?'

'You shall be killed', they responded.

Then 'Alī said: 'How dare you kill a slave of God and the brother of the Messenger of God?'

'Alī's strong resistance in opposing the caliphate resulted in his being left alone. The Imam took the opportunity and made for the Prophet's grave where he expressed his grievances, uttering the same words which Aaron spoke to Moses: '*Indeed, this people thought me to be weak, and they were about to kill me*' (7:150).[1]

The Judgement of History about the Assault on the House of Revelation

The events that unfolded subsequent to the assembly of Saqīfah are among the most painful and bitter in Islamic history, and in the life of the Imam. To bring these historical facts to light, and appraise them objectively, is a cause of deep agitation for people with fanatical views regarding those persons responsible for these incidents, and in whose hands the course of events was being directed. They seek to prevent, as far as possible, any stigma from being attached to them, in order to uphold their sanctity, status, and dignity. However, any attempt to obscure the realities of history, or to portray events in a manner contrary to the way they actually unfolded, constitutes both a betrayal of history, and a betrayal of future generations. An open-minded and objective writer never sacrifices the truth for the sake of safeguarding the reputation of a particular group of people.

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[1] Ibn Qutaybah, *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 12–13.

The most important historical event that took place after the election of Abū Bakr as caliph was the assault on the house of revelation, that is, Fāṭimah's home, with the intention of forcibly taking out those who took refuge in her house to the mosque, and compelling them to pledge their allegiance. To be able to assess and evaluate this matter correctly, we need to ask the following three questions, and then make an appropriate judgement on the basis of the answers we give, having recourse only to the most authentic sources:

1. Is it true that the caliph's agents had taken the decision to burn Fāṭimah's house? If so, how far did they go in implementing this decision?
2. Is it true that they took ʿAlī in a most lamentable manner to the mosque to obtain his allegiance?
3. Is it true that in this event, the daughter of the Prophet suffered an injury by the attackers, to such an extent that she lost her unborn baby?

These are the most sensitive issues in this incident, and they will be discussed on the basis of the works and documents written by Sunni scholars.

It is one of the fundamental rules of Islamic life that no Muslim can enter anyone's house without permission, and if the owner of the house refuses entry, then one is to accept the refusal without any anger, and leave the place. For example, the following verse of the Qur'an reads:

> *O you who have faith! Do not enter houses other than your own until you have announced [your arrival] and greeted their occupants. That is better for you. Maybe you will take admonition. But if you do not find anyone in them, do not enter them until you are given permission, and if you are told: 'Turn back,' then do turn back. That is more decent for you. And God knows best what you do.* (24:27–28)[1]

Apart from this ethical teaching, the Qur'an tells us that any house in which the name of God is remembered, and He is praised therein, must be granted great respect: '*In houses God has allowed to be raised and wherein His name is celebrated, He is glorified therein, morning and evening*' (24:36).

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[1] Many commentators have stated that *buyūt* (houses) in the mentioned verses only refers to mosques, but a mosque is simply one type of house.

To honour these houses is to revere the pious occupants constantly invoking and worshipping God, and has nothing to do with the mud and bricks of the building itself. Among all the houses of the Muslims, the holy Qur'an gives explicit injunctions relating to the house of the Prophet: '*O you who have faith! Do not enter the Prophet's houses unless permission is granted you*' (33:53).

There can be no doubt that Fāṭimah's house is one of the most highly honoured and revered of all houses, where al-Zahrā' and her family are constantly praising God. It is not possible to accept that the house of 'Ā'ishah or that of Ḥafṣah are among the Prophet's houses, but Fāṭimah's house – she who is the most honourable of all ladies in the world – is indeed one of them.

Now we can observe to what extent the agents of the caliphate manifested the respect due to the Prophet's house. Studying the events of the early days of the caliphate proves that they ignored the Qur'anic verses and disregarded the exclusive rights and honour which should have been accorded to such a house. Many Sunni historians have referred to this attack on the sanctity of the house of revelation – some in an obscure and ambiguous manner, others in a more explicit manner.

Al-Ṭabarī, who was particularly prejudiced in favour of the caliphs, writes simply: "Umar came to 'Alī's house and said: "I will burn this house over you, or bring you out from it so that you pledge your allegiance.""[1]

However, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī lifted the veil further and wrote that 'Umar not only said this, but he also ordered a pile of firewood to be placed around the house and continued: 'I swear to God, in Whose hands is the soul of 'Umar, either you leave the house or I will set it on fire and burn it.' When 'Umar was informed that the Prophet's daughter was in the house, he replied: 'So be it'.[2]

Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 495 AH / 1101 CE), the author of *'Iqd al-Farīd*, went even further and declared:

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[1] *Ta'rīkh* (published by Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif), vol. 3, p. 202; see also Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 56, where this sentence is also narrated, citing it from the work *Saqīfah*, by al-Jawharī.

[2] Ibn Qutaybah, *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 2, p. 12; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 134; *A'lām al-Nisā'*, vol. 3, p. 1205.

> Abū Bakr commissioned 'Umar to drive out those had taken refuge in the house of Fāṭimah, and said to him: 'If they refuse, then fight them'. Therefore, 'Umar went to the house with a firebrand to burn the house. He was confronted by Fāṭimah, who said to him: 'O son of Khaṭṭāb! Have you come to burn our house?'

'Umar replied: 'Yes, unless you enter into what has been entered into by the rest of the *ummah*.'[1]

When we refer to the works of the Shi'a scholars, this episode is elucidated to a greater degree. Sulaym ibn Qays[2] in his book *Aṣl Sulaym* gave a full account of the attack on the house of revelation: 'The caliph's agent made a fire, then he pushed the door and entered inside the house, but he was confronted by Fāṭimah's resistance.'[3]

A great Shi'a scholar, Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, discusses this event extensively. He cites a saying of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: "Alī refused his allegiance until he saw thick smoke entering his house.'[4]

We need go no further as regards answering the first question, and let awakened hearts pass the appropriate judgement; we now resume our account of this event on the basis of Sunni sources.

The Manner in which 'Alī was taken to the Mosque

This section of Islamic history, similar to the previous one, is heart-rending and bitter. It was inconceivable that a personality such as 'Alī could have been taken in such an undignified manner to the mosque. Such were the circumstances that, forty years later, Mu'āwiyah cynically mentioned the incident in his letter to 'Alī. After reminding 'Alī of his resistance to the caliphal authority, Mu'āwiyah continued: '...such that the caliphal agents pulled you like a wild camel to the mosque to obtain your pledge.'[5]

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[1] *'Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 4, p. 260. See also Abū al-Fidā', *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1, p. 156; *A'lām al-Nisā'*, vol. 3, p. 1207.

[2] Sulaym ibn Qays Kūfī was one of the *tābi'ūn*, the generation following that of the Prophet and his companions. He lived until the imamate of 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn (Imam al-Sajjād), and passed away during the rule of Ḥajjāj (*c.* 90 AH / 709 CE); his work, *Aṣl Sulaym*, is an important and very reliable Shi'a source.

[3] *Aṣl Sulaym* (Najaf edition), p. 74.

[4] Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, *Talkhīṣ al-Shāfī*, vol. 3, p. 76.

[5] For the full text of Mu'āwiyah's letter, see Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 15, p. 186.

In his reply to Muʿāwiyah's letter, the Imam implicitly accepted this version of the event, regarding it as an instance of the injustice done to him; he wrote:

> You said that I was dragged like a wild camel in order to gain my pledge of allegiance. You do so in order to criticise me, but in fact you praise me; you wanted to disgrace me, but you have disgraced yourself. There is never any shame attached to a Muslim if he is the victim of an injustice.[1]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd was not the only historian to have narrated this act of disrespect towards the Imam's holy personage. Before him, the event was also described by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih in *ʿIqd al-Farīd* (vol. 2, p. 285), and after him, by the author of *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* (vol. 1, p. 128).

It is somewhat surprising that Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, in his *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (vol. 2, p. 60), in the course of commenting on Letter 28 of the *Nahj al-Balāghah*, mentioned ʿAlī's and Muʿāwiyah's correspondence, without casting any doubt over the veracity of the event mentioned therein. But earlier in the same work, in the course of commenting on Sermon 26, he denies that such an incident ever took place, saying that such reports are found only in Shiʿa sources, and that no other groups related such an event!

Disrespect for Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'

The third question posed above referred to the Prophet's daughter: during the forceful effort to obtain the pledge of allegiance from ʿAlī, did the caliphal agents insult Fāṭimah or not?

For Shiʿa scholars, answering this question is far more painful than answering the two previous questions. When the agents wanted to take ʿAlī to the mosque, they found themselves confronted with Fāṭimah's resistance. In order to prevent them from taking her husband, Fāṭimah suffered – both mentally and physically – to such an extent that neither the tongue nor the pen are capable of expressing it.[2]

However, the Sunni scholars were reticent and exercised self-restraint when dealing with this part of the story, in order to protect the status of the caliph. Even Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, as noted above, regarded this report as being found solely in Shiʿa sources. The great Shiʿa scholar, Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, writes as follows:

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 28.

[2] Among the Shiʿa sources which give a detailed account of this aspect of the event, see Sulaym ibn Qays, *Aṣl Sulaym*, p. 74ff.

> At first, historians and traditionists reported the insult to the Prophet's daughter, and this incident was thus well known. It was reported that the caliph's agent forcefully opened the door of Fāṭimah's house, striking her; as a consequence she miscarried, and Qunfudh, by the order of ʿUmar, whipped Fāṭimah until she took her [protective] hands off ʿAlī. However, the writers later realised that reporting such an incident was detrimental to the status and authority of the caliph, and thus refrained from recounting such events.[1]

As supporting evidence of the statement of Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, reports of this tragic event can also be found in some Sunni sources, in spite of widespread censorship and prejudice. Al-Shahrastānī narrates from Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār, known as Ghuṭām, head of the Muʿtazilah school, as follows: 'At the time that ʿUmar was trying to obtain ʿAlī's allegiance, he forcefully opened the door of the house, hitting the side of Fāṭimah causing her to miscarry. ʿUmar also gave the order to burn the house, though nobody was in the house except ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.'[2]

Fāṭimah's station is higher than that of Zaynab, another daughter of the Prophet

Abū ʿĀṣ, husband of Zaynab, daughter of the Prophet, was captured in a battle. But like other prisoners of war he was later released. Abū ʿĀṣ promised the Prophet that after returning to Mecca he would arrange his wife's travelling requirements for Medina. The Messenger of God ordered Zayd ibn Ḥārithah and a group from among the Helpers to receive Zaynab's camel-litter eight miles from Mecca, and to accompany her to Medina. The Quraysh became aware that Zaynab had left Mecca, and some of them decided to try and bring her back to the city. Jabbār ibn Aswad and a number of others managed to reach Zaynab's camel-litter, and Jabbār struck it so forcefully with his spear that Zaynab miscarried, and she returned to Mecca. Upon hearing this news, the Prophet was deeply upset. Years later, after the conquest of Mecca, he authorised the execution of Jabbār.

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[1] See *Talkhīṣ al-Shāfī*, vol. 3, p. 76, a work by al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā and abridged by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.

[2] Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 2, p. 95.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd wrote: 'I reminded my master, Abū Ja'far, of this incident. He replied: "The Prophet sanctioned the killing of a man who had terrified his daughter Zaynab in such a way that she miscarried; if the Prophet had been alive when Fāṭimah lost her unborn child, Muḥsin, after being similarly terrified, he would have authorised the execution of those responsible."'[1]

Government of the People for the People

There are two groups of people who try to justify the caliphate of the caliphs as a form of 'government of the people for the people' or legitimate it in terms of the principle of consultation (*shūrā*). Firstly, there are people who constantly wish to establish an agreement between Islamic principles and modern ideas and scientific paradigms; trying thereby to attract the attention and interest of westerners or westernised people, making Islam more appealing to them. Such people suggest that the principle of 'government of the people for the people' was not of modern western provenance, but originated in early Muslim political culture, fourteen centuries ago: after the Prophet's passing away, the Muslims conceived of this principle and applied it to their situation, thus popularly electing the new leader of the Islamic polity as the successor to the Prophet. This group, despite their good intentions, do not go to the trouble of actually conducting serious research on these issues, or consulting experts in the field. As a result their theories are fanciful conjectures based on superficial analogies and self-serving opinions.

Secondly, there are others who are opposed to Shi'a Islam, for one reason or another. They may have certain psychological complexes, or else find themselves attracted to Sunni interpretations, so that instead of challenging corruption on the ethical and doctrinal planes, they set out to weaken the principles of Shi'ism in the minds of dedicated but simple-minded youths.

The mistakes of the former group are remediable. By presenting authentic and reliable sources to them, their errors can be rectified. Therefore, it is inappropriate to speak ill of them; rather, one should enter into scholarly and intellectual dialogue with them. However, any attempt to rectify the opinions of the latter group will be fraught with difficulty. This group not only lack any true understanding of religion, but also they suffer from psychological complexes. Hence, any attempt to guide them would be futile. What is important is to try and prevent naive youths from being subjected to their ideas; and if they do take on some of these false ideas, to try and remove all problems and doubts from their hearts.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, p. 192.

One should pose this question: does either reason or religion give the agents of the ruling government the right to attack a house, and drag those who have taken refuge therein to the mosque in order to obtain their allegiance? Do the laws of democracy allow their leader to dispatch a group to seek allegiance by force from those who are either in the opposition or else neutral; and if they refuse, to fight them?

The historical record bears witness that ʿUmar, more than other members of the ruling party, insisted on collecting as many pledges of allegiance as possible, going so far as to fight them in pursuit of this aim.

Zubayr was one of the people who took refuge in the house of Fāṭimah. His relationship to the family of the Prophet had not yet turned sour. Therefore, at the time of the attack, Zubayr, with his sword unsheathed, came out of the house and declared: 'I will never swear allegiance; rather, everybody should swear allegiance to ʿAlī'.

Zubayr was well known as a courageous warrior and a skilled swordsman. His sword thrusts were striking and distinctive, such that all could recognise them as belonging to him. Consequently, the agents were alert to the danger he posed, and jointly attacked him taking his sword from his hand, and thus preventing much blood from being shed.

What was the motive for ʿUmar's insistence, and his apparent dedication to the cause of the caliphate? Was it due to some good and pure intentions on ʿUmar's part that such aggressive steps were taken? Or was it on account of some secret agreement between Abū Bakr and him?

While ʿAlī was being subjected to this pressure, and constantly being threatened with death, he called out to ʿUmar: 'O ʿUmar! Milk it well, for half of it will be yours, and tie up the camel of Abū Bakr's caliphate, until he returns it to you tomorrow!'[1]

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 12; see also *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon, where the Imam expresses a similar view.

If obtaining the pledges of allegiance for Abū Bakr were really based on democratic principles, and if the political procedure in question were truly an application of the principle of the Qur'an – '*and their affairs are determined by mutual consultation*' (42:38) – why, on his deathbed, did Abū Bakr regret having done three things?

1. He wished that he had respected the inviolability of the house of Fāṭimah, and had not ordered the assault upon it, even if its door were locked against his agents.
2. He wished that he had not accepted the burden of the caliphate, and instead had given this responsibility to 'Umar or Abū 'Ubaydah, to whom he would act as an advisor.
3. He wished that he had not burned alive Iyās ibn 'Abd Allāh, known as 'al-Fajāh'.[1]

It is deplorable that a well-known Egyptian poet, Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (d. 1351 AH/ 1932 CE), composed a eulogy entitled *'Umariyyah*, in praise of the second caliph's courage and his audacity in insulting Fāṭimah:

> Remember the sayings of 'Umar to 'Alī:
> revere the listener; respect the speaker.
> [He said to 'Alī]: 'I shall burn your house, nothing of it shall survive,
> if you withhold allegiance, even though the daughter
> of Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā be inside'.
> None but the father of Ḥafṣ could have uttered such words,
> Confronting the courageous knight of the Arabs
> of 'Adnān[2] and his companion.[3]

This ignorant poet sees a crime that shakes even the throne of God as one of the glorious feats of 'Umar! Is it really a great honour to say that 'Umar had such disrespect for the beloved daughter of the Prophet that he was willing to burn Fāṭimah and her house for the sake of obtaining more votes for Abū Bakr?

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 236; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 463.

[2] 'Adnān was the name of the chief of a tribe descended from Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm. [Translator]

[3] *Dīwān Shā'ir al-Nīl*, vol. 1, p. 84.

The following report, narrated by the author of *'Iqd al-Farīd*, is somewhat laughable. It states that when 'Alī was taken to the mosque the caliph asked him: 'Are you unhappy with our leadership?' 'Alī replied: 'Not at all! But I have made a pledge to myself, that after his death, I would not don the garb [of caliphate] until I have compiled the Qur'an. It is for this reason that I have fallen behind the others!' Then, according to the report, he gave his pledge of allegiance to the caliph.[1]

However, the author and other scholars, narrating a report from 'Ā'ishah, have asserted that during the last six months of Fāṭimah's life, that is, during Abū Bakr's caliphate, 'Alī refused to pledge his allegiance; but after her death, he did offer the caliph his allegiance.[2]

However, the above statement is incorrect too. Because not only did 'Alī withhold his allegiance, as his sayings in *Nahj al-Balāghah* clearly testify, but also a group of people, whose names had been mentioned in the account of the Saqīfah incident, withheld their allegiance also. The greatest champion of 'Alī's authority (*wilāyah*), Salmān al-Fārsī, made the following remark regarding the caliphate of Abū Bakr: 'You have offered the caliphate to a person who is greater than you only in terms of age, while ignoring the household of the Prophet. If the caliphate had remained in its axial position, no conflict would have appeared; and everyone would have partaken of the blessed fruits of the [true] caliphate.'[3]

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[1] *'Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 4, p. 260.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 69.

4

ʿAlī and Fadak

The Financial Value of Fadak

The conflicts and controversies surrounding the caliphate and the Saqīfah incident died down, and Abū Bakr took up the reins of power as the successor to the Prophet. ʿAlī and his faithful companions departed from the political scene of government. After illuminating the true nature of the situation and awakening the conscience of the people, he refrained from manifesting any further opposition, doing this for the sake of the unity of the Muslims. However, he continued to discharge all of his individual and social duties, such as elucidating the profundities of the Qur'an, passing wise legal judgements, engaging in dialogues with the scholars among the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), and so on.

Among the Muslims, ʿAlī was regarded as a person possessing the most magnificent virtues and distinctions, a range of dazzling qualities that was unobtainable by anyone else. Not only was he the first cousin, son-in-law, and immediate legatee (*waṣī*) of the Messenger, he was also the renowned hero, and the gateway to the city of prophetic knowledge. No one could deny or diminish such distinctions and merits (*faḍā'il*) as his precedence in Islam, his comprehensive knowledge of the Qu'rān and hadith, his mastery of the principles (*uṣūl*) of religion and their details (*furūʿ*), and his knowledge of the other revealed scriptures.

In addition to these distinctions, ʿAlī had another, very specific one, which was a source of potential problems for the caliphal authority: that was the economic power he gained from the income yielded by the orchards of Fadak. Therefore, the state authorities deemed it necessary to deprive him of this power for, unlike his other distinctions, which could not be taken from him, this tangible one could.[1]

Specific Details Concerning Fadak

Fadak was a fertile land situated near Khaybar and approximately 140 kilometres away from Medina. For the Jews of the Hejaz, this village was second only to the fortresses of Khaybar as regards their choice of habitation.[2]

The Prophet defeated the Jewish forces in Khaybar, Wādī al-Qurā, and Taymā, and consequently succeeded in filling the vacuum of power that he sensed as a danger to the north of Medina, establishing an effective military presence of Islam in this area. Also, in an attempt to end once and for all the threat of Jewish power against Islam, and to deter any possible act of provocation against the Muslims, the Prophet dispatched an envoy called Muḥīṭ to the leaders of Fadak.

Yūshaʿ ibn Nūn was the chief of the village. He opted for peace rather than war. The inhabitants guaranteed to pay half of their annual crop to the Messenger, to refrain from plots against Muslims, and to live peacefully under the protection of Islam. In return, the Islamic government guaranteed to establish security throughout the region. In Islam, lands captured by means of military expeditions belonged to all Muslims, and its affairs were handed over to the duly appointed Muslim governor. However, territories acquired without any force were the private property of the Prophet or his succeeding imam. Such property was to be put to specific uses, in accordance with the injunctions of Islam, and one such was that the Prophet or the imam could utilise the property in order to meet the legitimate needs and requirements of their close kin (see Qur'an 59:6–7).[3]

A Gift from the Prophet to Fāṭimah

According to Shiʿa, as well as a number of Sunni, commentators and traditionists, the Prophet called his daughter Fāṭimah to him and granted her the village of Fadak immediately after the revelation of the Qur'anic verse: '*Give the near of kin their* [*due*] *right, and the needy and the traveller* [*as well*]' (17:26).[1] This report was narrated by one of the Prophet's great companions called Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī.

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[1] For further details see the section below, 'Motives for the Expropriation of Fadak'.

[2] See Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān wa Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilāʿ*, under 'Fadak'.

[3] In jurisprudential sources this issue is discussed under the title of *fay'*.

All Shi'a and Sunni commentators, without exception, accept that the above verse was specifically revealed in relation to the Prophet's relatives, and the daughter of the Prophet was the best of all the possible referents of the phrase 'near of kin' (*dhā al-qurbā*). Once a man from Syria asked 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn, Imam Zayn al-'Abidīn (the fourth Shi'a Imam and grandson of 'Alī) to introduce himself; in response the Imam simply recited the above mentioned verse of the Qur'an by way of identifying himself. The import of this verse was so well understood by all Muslims that the Syrian traveller, while nodding his head to confirm that he had understood what was implied in the recitation of this verse, said the following: 'It is on account of the close kinship which you have with the Prophet that God had ordered the Prophet to render you your rights.'[2]

In short, all Muslims have accepted that the verse in question was specifically revealed in relation to Fāṭimah and her offspring. But as regards the fact that Fadak was granted to Fāṭimah immediately following the revelation of this verse, this is acknowledged by all Shi'a authorities and some Sunni scholars.

Why did the Prophet grant Fadak to his daughter?

The life history of the Prophet and his household clearly testifies that none of them had any desire for worldly wealth. Material property had no value to them, yet we observe that the Prophet granted Fadak to his daughter and then to 'Alī's family and descendants. Why did the Prophet grant Fadak to his daughter? This question can be replied to as follows.

Firstly, after the Prophet's passing away, according to the repeated explicit designation of the Prophet, 'Alī was the supreme authority for the Muslims as regards all their affairs. Such a status and responsibility required huge expenditure. 'Alī could benefit from the income of Fadak in order to properly manage the affairs of the caliphate. It would appear that the caliphal authorities were aware of the Prophet's foresight and preparations in this regard; therefore Fadak was taken away from them during the very first few days of Abū Bakr's rule.

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[1] *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, p. 411; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 268; *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 177.

[2] *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 176.

Secondly, the Prophet's progeny, embodied perfectly in the form of his daughter, Fāṭimah, as well as her sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, had the right to live in a respectable and independent manner, in accordance with the spiritual dignity that was proper to their kinship with the Messenger of God. This was another reason why the Prophet bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah.

Thirdly, the Prophet was fully aware that a group of people harboured hostility against 'Alī, because many of their relatives had been killed by the sword of 'Alī in the course of the battles against the early enemies of Islam. One of the means by which such animosity towards 'Alī could be allayed was to help these people financially, so that their hearts might soften towards him. Also, it was 'Alī's duty to aid the needy and deprived members of the community. In this way many obstacles of a psychological and emotional nature could be removed from the path of 'Alī's caliphate.

It would seem that even though the Messenger had bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah, its income would be at the disposal of her husband, the designated ruler of the Muslims, so that, in addition to being able to provide for his own family, he would also be able to utilise the income for the benefit of Islam and Muslims at large.

The Income of Fadak

When we refer to the historical sources, the three factors mentioned above become all the more salient. Fadak was a fertile area, capable of substantially assisting 'Alī in his effort to realise his lofty aspirations. In his *Sīrah*, the renowned historian al-Ḥalabī states:

> Abū Bakr was inclined to leave Fadak in the hands of the Messenger's daughter, even going so far as to certify Fāṭimah's ownership through the drafting of a special document. But 'Umar prevented Abū Bakr from giving her the document, saying: 'In the future you will desperately need Fadak's income. If the Arab pagans revolt against Islam, how will you obtain the income needed to pay for expenses of war?'[1]

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[1] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 400.

The above statement implies that Fadak's income was so substantial as to be able to offset part of the costs incurred by war. In this light one can better appreciate why it was necessary for the Prophet to hand over this economic power to 'Alī.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes:

> I put it to one of the Imami scholars that the Fadak oasis was a small piece of land with a few palm trees. It was not so important for Fāṭimah to be so insistent on retaining this as her property. He replied: 'You are wrong, the number of palm trees in Fadak was not less than the sum of all the palm trees of Kufa today. It is quite obvious that the aim behind depriving the Messenger's family of such a fertile land was to withdraw its income from 'Alī, lest he use it in the service of his opposition to the caliphal authority. Therefore, not only was Fāṭimah deprived of Fadak, but the entire clan of Banū Hāshim and the progeny of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib were deprived of their due [one fifth of the *ghanā'im*, wealth to be distributed by the Prophet]. When individuals are forced to struggle for their livelihood or are in dire need, they can hardly venture to oppose the government of their day.'[1]

According to Mūsā ibn Ja'far, Imam al-Kāẓim: 'Fadak was surrounded from one side by Aden, from another by Samarqand, from another by Africa and from a fourth side it was bounded by seas, islands, and Armenia.'[2]

However, we know that Fadak was part of the area of Khaybar, and had no such borders. What Imam al-Kāẓim meant was that when Fadak was usurped, it was not Fadak alone, but also the governance of the extensive lands of Islam having such borders which was taken away from the family of the Prophet.

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī has remarked:

> The land of Fadak was rented out for 24,000 dinars by the Messenger. Some other reports quoted the rent at 70,000 dinars. Such a discrepancy was due to the range covered by the annual income of the different years. At the time of Mu'āwiyah's caliphate, he divided Fadak into three parts. One third was given to Marwān ibn Ḥakam, one third to 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān, and the third part was given to his son, Yazīd. When Marwān

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 236.

[2] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 48, p. 144.

> acceded to the caliphate, he expropriated the other two shares, annexing them to his own, thus taking the whole of Fadak for himself.[1]

The above statement reveals the magnitude of the income derived from Fadak, for it was substantial enough for Mu'āwiyah to divide it between the heads of three large families. When Fāṭimah went to Abū Bakr and set forth the evidence in support of her claim to Fadak, Abū Bakr responded: 'Fadak was not the personal property of the Messenger, rather, it was the property of all the Muslims. From its income, the Prophet would pay for military expeditions and give charity in the cause of God.'[2]

The fact that the Prophet could pay for military expeditions or give charitable donations to the Banū Hāshim or to those in need, through the income of Fadak provides further evidence of its substantial income. When 'Umar decided to clear the Arabian peninsula of all Jewish settlements, he ordered the Jewish tribes to give up their territories to the Muslim state, and in return they would receive the value of the lands.

From the outset, the Messenger had a treaty with the Jews of Fadak, according to which they would possess the yield of half of the land, and grant the other half to the Messenger of God. So, 'Umar sent Ibn Tayhān, Farwah, Ḥubāb, and Zayd ibn Thābit to Fadak to pay the appropriate price for the half of the land that was to be appropriated. The land was valued at 50,000 dirhams. This amount was paid to the Jewish inhabitants and their share of Fadak was thereby purchased. 'Umar had obtained this sum from the treasury of Iraq.[3]

Motives for the Expropriation of Fadak

The first major victory for Abū Bakr's caliphate was, of course, gaining the support of some key individuals among the Prophet's companions. Consequently, the most powerful branch of the Helpers, the Khazraj tribe, confronting other branches of the Helpers, abandoned the scene. The Banū Hāshim, with 'Alī as their head, for the reasons already mentioned, refrained from armed rebellion against the government, after 'Alī had awakened the conscience of the public and made them aware of the reality of the situation.

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[1] Ibid., vol. 16, p. 216.

[2] Ibid., p. 214.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 211.

However, this relative victory in Medina was not sufficient for securing the caliphate; the support of Mecca was also necessary. But the Banū Umayyah, with Abū Sufyān as their chief, were a powerful clan who had not officially recognised the caliphate. They were waiting for directives from Abū Sufyān. When the news of the Prophet's passing away reached Mecca, the governor of Mecca, a young man in his twenties, called ʿAttāb ibn Usayd ibn ʿĀṣ, made an announcement to the people that the Prophet had died, but said nothing about the election of the Prophet's caliph. Insofar as both incidents occurred simultaneously, it is most unlikely that only one piece of news would have reached Mecca and not the other.

This silence on the part of the governor seemed to have been caused by his need to know what position was being adopted by the chief of his clan, Abū Sufyān; only once he knew the latter's point of view could he then take appropriate action.

In light of these realities, the caliph realised that in order to firmly establish his authority, it was necessary that he placate different groups and influential figures through appropriate ways and means. He knew that until he had won over their minds – and more importantly, their hearts – his position would not be secure. One of these influential figures to be won over was the leader of the Umayyad family, Abū Sufyān, who was opposed to Abū Bakr's caliphate. When he heard that Abū Bakr had taken power, Abū Sufyān announced in direct opposition to him: 'What has Abū Fuḍayl to do with us?' Also, it was Abū Sufyān who, immediately upon arriving in Medina, went to the houses of ʿAlī and ʿAbbās, and incited them to rise up to set things right, saying: 'I will fill Medina with my horsemen and foot-soldiers. Rise up and seize the reins of power!'

In order to pacify Abū Sufyān and purchase his good will, Abū Bakr returned all of Abū Sufyān's possessions, and not even a dinar was taken from his wealth. Abū Bakr was not satisfied with this generous act, however, he also appointed Abū Sufyān's son, Yazīd (Muʿāwiyah's brother), as governor of Syria. When news of this reached Abū Sufyān, he immediately said: 'Abū Bakr has tied the bond of kinship!'[1] Prior to this, Abū Sufyān had asserted that there was no meaningful relationship of any description between him and Abū Bakr.

The number of those whose support, like that of Abū Sufyān, had to be bought, is too many to mention in these pages. This is the result of the pledge of allegiance taken in Saqīfah, which occurred in the absence of all but three of the Migrants (that is, Abū Bakr himself, and two of his supporters, 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah). Doubtless, this act created considerable anger among the Migrants. It was thus an unavoidable necessity for Abū Bakr to do whatever he could to placate them, and to win over their support. Similarly, it was imperative for him to enlist those companions among the Helpers, particularly members of the Khazraj, who from the first day refused to pledge their allegiance to him, and left Saqīfah in anger.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 202.

In addition to trying to win the support of men, the caliph distributed some wealth among the women of the Helpers. But when Zayd ibn Thābit went to one of the women of Banū 'Adī to give her her share, the respectable lady inquired: 'What is this?' Zayd replied: 'The caliph has distributed these shares among women, and this is your share'. The intelligent lady surmised that what she was being offered was nothing but a religious bribe. Therefore, she said: 'Are you trying to purchase my religion? By God, I shall accept none of it!', and she returned it to him.[1]

The Budget Deficit of the Treasury

During his final illness, the Prophet had distributed whatever was in his possession; consequently the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) was empty. After the Prophet's death, his representatives arrived in Medina with very little in the way of wealth. Such small amounts were insufficient for the government's expenditures – such as purchasing the support of its opponents.

From another angle, the surrounding tribes rose against the state, and refused the payment of the legal alms (*zakāh*) to the caliph's agents, thereby inflicting another financial blow to the treasury. Thus, the leaders of the ruling party had no choice but to seek help from all directions to raise funds to remedy the shortage of state funds. One way of doing this was to confiscate property, and no property was better than Fadak. The caliph related a hadith – 'we prophets do not bequeath any inheritance' – of which he was the sole narrator. On the basis of this saying, he deprived Fāṭimah of Fadak. Consequently, Fadak's huge income was used to strengthen the foundations of the caliphal state. 'Umar, in an implicit manner, confessed to this fact by saying, as noted above: 'In the future you will desperately need Fadak's income. If the Arab pagans revolt against Islam, how will you obtain the income needed to pay for expenses of war?'[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 133.

The sayings and actions of the caliph and his supporters testify to this fact. Thus, when Fāṭimah claimed Fadak from Abū Bakr, the caliph replied: 'The Prophet provided your expenditure from that source, and the rest of its revenue he divided between the Muslims, so what will you do with its revenue?' Fāṭimah replied: 'I will follow his arrangement and distribute the remaining amount among the Muslims'. Although this was an irrefutable reply, Abū Bakr persisted: 'I will also do what your father did!'[2]

If there were no other ulterior motives for acquiring Fadak, and the caliph truly wanted to only to implement the divinely revealed injunction in regard to its income, namely, to distribute to the Muslims the amount left over after the family of the Prophet had been properly catered for, then, one might ask: what difference would it have made whether the Prophet's daughter and her husband – who, according to an explicit verse of the Qur'an, were divested and purified of all sins – discharged this duty or the caliph did so? The insistence of Abū Bakr, however, upon retaining Fadak at his disposal demonstrates that it was expropriated chiefly for the sake of shoring up the financial foundations of his own caliphate.

Another Motive for the Expropriation

Another factor that needs to be stressed again in this connection was fear of 'Alī's financial power. 'Alī possessed all the requisite conditions for leadership. His complete knowledge, piety, precedence and his kinship with the Prophet, and the Prophet's declarations about him as his successor were all beyond dispute. Were he to have, in addition to all these qualities, financial power, this would be seen by his opponents as extremely dangerous. For, he could use this as part of his strategy to weaken the already unsteady foundations of the caliphate, were he so inclined. While his innate qualities of leadership were not susceptible to expropriation, this financial power was. From this point of view, one can see more clearly why it was deemed imperative to deprive the family of the Prophet of this major financial asset, and to render them dependent upon the caliphal administration.

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[1] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 400.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 316.

This fact is clearly manifested in the statement made by ʿUmar to Abū Bakr: 'People are slaves of the world; they have no other goal but this world. Take away from ʿAlī his share of the *khums* ['one fifth'] and the spoils, and also confiscate Fadak. When people see his empty hands, they will abandon him, and instead incline towards you.'[1]

Another proof of this motivation was that, not only did the caliphate deprive the family of the Prophet of Fadak, they also took from them their share of the fifth of the spoils (*ghanāʾim*) that was their due, according to an explicit proof-text (*naṣṣ*) of the Qur'an: '*Know that whatever thing you may come by, a fifth of it is for God and the Messenger, and for the near of kin*' (8:41). After the death of the Prophet, his family received not a single dinar from their rightful due of these spoils.

It is a commonly held view among the historians that the dispute between Fāṭimah and Abū Bakr concerned Fadak only. However, her dispute with the caliph was based on three issues:

1. Fadak, given by the Prophet to Fāṭimah;
2. the inheritance left by the Prophet for her;
3. the share of the near of kin (*dhī al-qurbā*) from the fifth of the war spoils, as explicitly designated in the Qur'an.

It is reported that ʿUmar said: 'When Fāṭimah demanded Fadak and her share of the spoils of the near of kin, the caliph refused to give them to her.'

Similarly, Anas ibn Mālik reports:

> Fāṭimah came to the first caliph and recited the Qur'anic verse on *khums* in which reference is made to the share due to the near of kin. Abū Bakr said: 'I also recite the same Qur'an. I can never give you the share of the near of kin, but I am willing to provide your household with its expenses, and the remainder will be spent on the welfare of the Muslims.' Fāṭimah said: 'This is not what God decreed. When the verse of *khums* was revealed, the Prophet said: "Glad tidings for Muḥammad's family: God out of his Bounty has made them self-sufficient."' The caliph replied: 'I will consult ʿUmar and Abū ʿUbaydah, if they agree with you, then I

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[1] *Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh*, vol. on Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, p. 122.

> am ready to give you the entire portion of the near of kin'. When the two men were consulted, they agreed with Abū Bakr's opinion. Fāṭimah was astonished, and became aware of their connivance.[1]

The first caliph was clearly engaging in his own *ijtihād*, or personal interpretation, of the verse of the Qur'an. It is explicitly stated in the Qur'an that a share of the 'fifth of the spoils of wars' belongs to the near of kin. But, on the pretext that the first caliph heard nothing himself from the Prophet in this regard, he interpreted the verse to mean that the family of the Prophet were only entitled to receive their living expenses, and that the remainder was to be spent on the welfare of the Muslims. The purpose behind this was clearly to deprive 'Alī of any worldly assets, so rendering him dependent on the state; hence, even the notion of revolt against the ruling administration would be inconceivable to him.

From the point of view of Shi'a jurisprudence, narratives transmitted through the Prophet's successors, the imams, make it clear that the share of the near of kin was not the personal property of the Prophet's family. If the Qur'an renders this share to the near of kin, this is because the ownership of this share, after the death of the Prophet, devolves to the rightful leaders of the *ummah*; that is, his true successors, who are his near of kin. Thus, the share designated for God, the Prophet, and the near of kin – which amounts to one half of the fifth of the spoils (8:41) – must be given to the Prophet's family who are the true authorities of the Muslim *ummah*, they have the duty to distribute that share as they see fit.

So, the caliph was fully aware that Fāṭimah's demand for the share of the near of kin was not based on a desire for personal property. Rather, it was based on a demand that this share be given to the person to whom it rightly belongs – the true leader of the Muslim *ummah* – so that he may use it for the sake of the welfare of the Muslims, and such a person was of course no one other than 'Alī. Thus, the bestowal of this right upon 'Alī would not only have entailed a major setback for Abū Bakr's caliphate, it would also have been tantamount to acknowledging the legitimacy of 'Alī's leadership. It is for this reason that the caliph said to Fāṭimah, as noted above: 'I can never give you the share of the near of kin, but I am willing to provide your household with its expenses, and the remainder will be spent on the welfare of the Muslims!'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, pp. 230–231.

Controversies and Contradictory Policies regarding Fadak

At the beginning of the caliphate, the confiscation of Fadak and the property of the daughter of the Prophet was primarily motivated by a desire to enrich the public treasury and to impoverish 'Alī, the true caliph. However, after the expansion of the Islamic state, and the conquests of foreign lands, a huge amount of wealth flooded the heart of the caliphate. Consequently, the caliphal administration no longer had any need of Fadak. From another angle, with the passage of time, the foundations of the caliphate became more firmly established within society, and nobody feared that, with the income from Fadak, the true caliph, 'Alī, would attempt an uprising against the ruling caliphate.

Despite the fact that for the subsequent caliphs the initial financial motivation for the confiscation of Fadak was henceforth nonexistent, it remained nonetheless the property of the rulers of the state, whose conduct in relation to it depended upon the prevailing attitude towards the family of the Prophet. Those rulers who harboured hostility against the Prophet's family withheld Fadak from them, retaining it as state lands, or else granted it to their relatives or other members of the ruling elite. But others, who may have had some genuine affection for the family of the Prophet, or who found it politically opportune to give Fadak back to its rightful owners, would return it to the descendants of Fāṭimah. This state of affairs would then be reversed by a subsequent caliph, who would revert to the previous policy.

The status of Fadak remained thus confused and unstable, being hostage to the contradictory policies of the different rulers. It was sometimes owned by its rightful owners, but mostly it was in the hands of its usurpers. The controversies surrounding it have made it a complex and sensitive issue throughout Islamic history.

However, from the time of Abū Bakr to the period of the Imam's caliphate, Fadak's position was stable. Its income was divided, a small portion being allocated for the maintenance of the Prophet's family, with the rest, like other state funds, disbursed according to the discretion of the caliph of the time.

During the rule of Mu'āwiyah, Fadak was divided into three portions. One portion he gave to Marwān, one to 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, and the third to his son, Yazīd. Fadak continued to be owned in this manner until Marwān ibn Ḥakam became caliph. He purchased the other two portions so that he became sole owner of the whole of Fadak and then bequeathed it to his son, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. In turn, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz either bequeathed Fadak to his son, ʿUmar, or else gave it to him as a gift while he was still alive.

When ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz became caliph, he resolved to try and purify Muslim society of the injustices and expropriations perpetrated by the Umayyad dynasty. In this connection, on account of the love he had for the family of the Prophet, the first property which he returned to its rightful owner was Fadak. According to one report, he gave it to Ḥasan ibn Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī; according to another report, he returned it to ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn, Imam al-Sajjād.[1] For this purpose ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz sent a letter to the governor of Medina, Abū Bakr ibn ʿAmr, commanding him to return Fadak to Fāṭimah's descendants. In response to the caliph's letter, the governor gave the following excuse: 'In Medina, Fāṭimah's descendants are numerous, each living with his own family. To which one of them should I return Fadak?' When the son of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz read the governor's letter, he became extremely angry and said: 'If I order you to kill a cow, you would ask, like the Children of Israel, what colour the cow should be! As soon as you receive this letter, give the land of Fadak to the descendants of Fāṭimah and ʿAlī'.

Certain figures within the caliphate, mainly from the different branches of the Umayyad clan, became very upset at the caliph's justice, saying, 'By making this order, you have denigrated the "two shaykhs" [i.e. Abū Bakr and ʿUmar].' ʿUmar ibn Qays, who had left Kufa together with a group of people, entered Damascus, and criticised the caliph's action. In response to this criticism, the caliph said:

> You are ignorant and foolish! What I remember is something you too have heard, but forgotten. My master, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ʿAmr ibn Ḥazm, narrated from his father and his grandfather that the Messenger of God said: 'Fāṭimah is part of me. Whatever angers her angers me, and whatever pleases her pleases me'. At the time of the caliphs, Fadak was public property and part of the state-owned lands. Later it was

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[1] The second report, transmitted through Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, is a weak one, in that Imam al-Sajjād passed away in 94 AH / 713 CE, while ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ascended to the throne in 99 AH / 717 CE. It is also possible that Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd meant Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn i.e. the son of Imam al-Sajjād.

> transferred to Marwān, who bequeathed it to my father, 'Abd al-'Azīz. After my father's death, my brothers and I inherited this land and my brothers sold or gave their shares to me. As for me, in accordance with the hadith of the Prophet, I have returned it to the descendants of Fāṭimah.

After the death of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the descendants of Marwān, one after another, acceded to the caliphate, but their policy was in direct contrast to that of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. As a result, Fadak remained in their hands, and the Prophet's family were completely deprived of its income.

After the decline of Umayyads and the establishment of the Abbasids, the status of Fadak underwent peculiar fluctuations: the first Abbasid caliph, Saffāḥ, returned Fadak to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥasan. After him, Manṣūr took power, and Fadak was seized again. Manṣūr's son, Mahdī, contrary to his father's policy, returned the land to the descendants of Fāṭimah. After Mahdī, his sons, Musā and Hārūn, successively took over the caliphate, and in turn they deprived the Prophet's family of Fadak. It remained thus, until Ma'mūn, son of Hārūn, became caliph.

One day Ma'mūn sat on his caliphal chair to formally redress any grievances that his subjects had. The first letter which he read was signed by the trustee and representative of Fāṭimah, appealing for the return of Fadak to the Prophet's lineage. Tears filled the caliph's eyes as he read the letter. He summoned the writer of the letter. After a while, an old man entered the court, and he started discussing with Ma'mūn the case in question. After these discussions, Ma'mūn became convinced of the legitimacy of the case, and ordered an official letter to be sent to the governor of Medina commanding the return of Fadak to the descendants of Fāṭimah.

The return of Fadak to its rightful owners delighted the Shi'as. Di'bil al-Khuzā'ī composed an ode for the occasion. It began with the following couplet:

A smile has appeared on the countenance of Time,

for Ma'mūn has returned Fadak to Hāshim.[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, pp. 216–218.

In the year 210 AH / 825 CE, Ma'mūn wrote an astonishing letter to the governor of Medina, Qayyim ibn Ja'far. The following is a summary of that letter:

> The Commander of the Faithful [referring to Ma'mūn himself], by virtue of the position entrusted to him in the religion of God, and in the Muslim caliphate, and on account of his relationship to the family of the Prophet, is one who is bound to observe the prophetic tradition, and to ensure that whatever was granted by the Prophet be properly executed. The Prophet granted Fadak to his daughter, Fāṭimah. This is so evident that none of the descendants of the Prophet are in any dispute concerning it. And nobody above them has made any claim that can be substantiated.
>
> On this basis, the Commander of the Faithful sees fit that, in order to obtain the good pleasure of God, and to establish justice and to uphold all rights, Fadak must be returned to the rightful heirs of the Messenger of God. He has consequently authorised his writers and clerks to register this proclamation in the official state archives. After the Prophet's passing away, at the time of the hajj rituals, there was an announcement that those who had received alms or a donation or some promise thereof from the Prophet, should inform the officers about their claims. The Muslims always believed the claimants. Surely the claim of the beloved daughter of the Prophet must likewise be believed, and born witness to by all.
>
> The Commander of the Faithful has instructed Mubārak al-Ṭabarī to return Fadak with all its land and rights, to the heirs of Fāṭimah. He also ordered him to return all the servants and other property in Fadak village to Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥasan ibn Zayd ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn.
>
> Know that this is the decision which has been inspired by God to the Commander of the Faithful, so that he may thereby seek nearness to God and the Prophet.
>
> Inform the officers in your charge about this proclamation, and strive to increase the prosperity, fertility, and wealth of Fadak.[1]

Fadak continued to be in the possession of Fāṭimah's progeny until the caliphate of Mutawakkil who was an enemy of the Prophet's family.

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[1] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 39–41; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 48.

Consequently, he confiscated Fadak from Fāṭimah's descendants and annexed it to the lands of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar Bāzyār.

The Prophet himself had planted eleven palm trees in Fadak with his own hands. During the hajj rituals, the people used to purchase, at great price, the dates of those palm trees in order to obtain blessings. The income from these dates made a significant contribution to the household of the Prophet. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar was deeply disturbed about this, so he sent a man called Bushayrān to Medina to cut down those palm trees. Bushayrān executed his task violently, but upon returning to Basra, he was struck with paralysis.

From that time onwards, the Prophet's family have been deprived of Fadak by unjust rulers, who out of enmity, have refused to return Fadak to its rightful owners.

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The Case of Fadak Exposed to Public Opinion

Fourteen centuries have elapsed since the expropriation of Fadak and the unheeded complaint of the daughter of the Prophet. Some may think that, given the length of time in question, it would be difficult for us today to arrive at an objective judgement of this case. The judge of such a case would find it difficult to examine the documents and all relevant historical aspects such as to become fully aware of everything needed to formulate an informed opinion on the case. It is possible that some distortion of the facts may have taken place, facts and records may have become confused with the passage of time. However, such is not the case. It is indeed possible to open the file afresh and present the case through clear and irrefutable references as found in the holy Qur'an, prophetic hadiths, and the claims and confessions of the two parties concerned. Then, in the light of certain basic and immutable principles of Islam, a proper evaluation and judgement of the case can be made.

One of the evident principles of Islamic law is that any territories that have been conquered by the Muslims in the absence of any battle or military engagement were placed at the disposal of the state as public property or, in technical terms, as *khāliṣah* lands, which were controlled by the Prophet himself when he was alive. The *khāliṣah* lands were not the Prophet's personal property, but belonged to the Islamic state, of which the Prophet was the supreme leader. Therefore, after the Prophet's death, the rights over such properties were inherited by the Prophet's successor, the rightful leader of the Muslims. In the holy Qur'an, this explicit principle of Islam is expressed thus:

> *The spoils that God gave to His messenger from them, you did not spur any horse for its sake, nor any riding camel, but God makes His prophets prevail over whomever He wishes, and God has power over all things. The spoils that God gave to His messenger from the people of the townships, are for God and the Messenger, the near of kin and the orphans, the needy and the traveller...* (59:6–7).

The properties which were at the disposal of the Prophet were of two kinds. On the one hand, there were private properties. The Prophet's private properties have been recorded in detail in the historical sources as well as the books of *sīrah*.[1] During his lifetime, the Prophet was personally in charge of his properties. After his passing, according to the Islamic law of inheritance, this was transferred to his heirs, unless it be proved that his heir be deprived of this kind of property, in which case it would be distributed as alms among the needy or spent on the welfare of Muslims generally. In later sections of this book, we present a detailed analysis of this issue, and we shall show that as regards the law of inheritance there is no difference between the heir of the Prophet and the heir of any other person; and also, we shall show that the hadith used by the first caliph to justify his deprivation of the Prophet's heirs has – if it be authentic – a completely different significance which the caliphal authorities neglected to consider.

On the other hand, there were the *khāliṣah* (state-owned) lands. The Prophet of Islam, as the leader (*walī*) of the Muslims had absolute rights over the state-owned properties and estates, which were technically known as *khāliṣah* properties; the income deriving therefrom was at his disposal to spend as he thought fit for the welfare of the Muslims. In jurisprudence, there is an issue known as *fay'*, which is mostly discussed in the law of jihad, and sometimes in charity law (*ṣadaqāt*). In Arabic, the word *fay'* means 'return', and it refers here to those territories which have been surrendered to the Islamic state without any battles or bloodshed having taken place; and the inhabitants of which are governed by conditions determined by the Islamic state. Such lands which had been acquired by peaceful means, and were at the disposal of the Prophet, were the property of the state; and the soldiers had no right over it. The Prophet spent the income derived from such lands on the welfare of the Muslims; he occasionally distributed some of this money among the poor, to help them establish the means of gaining an independent livelihood. The Prophet's disbursements were usually derived from the income of such properties and occasionally from the *khums* ('one fifth') of the spoils (*ghanā'im*).

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[1] See Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 2, p. 122.

It would be appropriate here to give an example of the way in which the Prophet used such funds.

The Banū al-Naḍīr comprised three Jewish tribes possessing homes and gardens and cultivated land near Medina. At the time of the Prophet's migration to Medina, the tribes of Aws and Khazraj believed in his message, but the three Jewish tribes remained firm in their religion. The Prophet exerted considerable effort in an attempt to establish a special pact embracing all the inhabitants of Medina for the sake of unity and fraternity among them all. Eventually, the three tribes entered into a pact with the Prophet, whereby they undertook to abstain from any kind of conspiracy against the Muslims, and from any actions which militate against the interests of the Muslims. However, the three tribes again and again, both openly and secretly, broke their covenant, conspiring to overthrow the Islamic state and to kill the Prophet.

For instance, when the Prophet was attending to some business in the lands of Banū al-Naḍīr, members of this tribe attempted to kill the Prophet. As a result, the Prophet forced them to leave Medina and distributed their houses and lands among the Migrants and the poor among the Helpers.[1]

In historical works some names of those who benefited from these lands and settled on them have been mentioned: from the Migrants there was 'Alī, Abū Bakr, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf, and Bilāl; and from the Helpers there was Abū Dujjānah, Sahl ibn Ḥunayf, and Ḥārith ibn Ṣimmah.[2]

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[1] See, for example, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, p. 260; and also other historical sources or books of *sīrah*.

[2] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 27, 31, 34; *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, p. 260; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, pp. 193–194.

Fadak was a *khāliṣah* land

The traditionists and biographers unanimously agree that Fadak was one of the territories categorised as a *khāliṣah* type of land. The land of Fadak was never an object of any military expedition; rather, when the news of the defeat of the stronghold of Khaybar reached the village of Fadak, all of its inhabitants agreed to sue for peace with the Prophet. Thus, in return for placing half of their lands at his disposal, they were given complete freedom to practise their faith, and to benefit from the protection of the Muslims, who were obliged to maintain peace and security in the region.[1]

On this issue, however, there is no dispute among the Islamic scholars, inasmuch as the recorded discussion between Fāṭimah and Abū Bakr about Fadak indicates that the two parties agreed that Fadak was indeed regarded as falling under the category of *khāliṣah* lands. Their main point of contention concerns another matter which will be elaborated later.

The Messenger bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah

All Shi'a scholars and a number of Sunni traditionists agree that after the revelation of the verse '*Give the near of kin their* [*due*] *right, and the needy and the traveller* [*as well*]' (Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:26), the Messenger bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah. The transmission chain (*sanad*) of this hadith goes back to two eminent companions of the Prophet, namely, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and Ibn 'Abbās. Among the Sunni traditionists who narrated this hadith, one may refer to the following nine.

1. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 909 AH / 1503 CE) who, in his well-known *tafsīr*, *Durr al-Manthūr*, states: 'When this verse was revealed, the Prophet called Fāṭimah and gave Fadak to her'. He also says: 'This hadith was transmitted from the Prophet on the authority of the renowned companion of the Prophet, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, by such traditionists as al-Bazzāz, Abū Ya'lā, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh'. He adds: 'On the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mardawayh narrated that when this verse was revealed, the Prophet bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah.'[2]

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[1] Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, vol. 2, p. 706; Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 408; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 41–46; Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 528; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 95–97.

[2] *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, p. 177.

2. ʻAlāʼ al-Dīn ʻAlī ibn Ḥusām known as Muttaqī al-Hindī (d. 976 AH / 1568 CE), an inhabitant of Mecca, also narrated the above hadith. He states: 'Some traditionists like Ibn al-Najjār and Ḥākim narrated this hadith on the authority of Abū Saʻīd al-Khudrī.'[1]
3. Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al- Nīsābūrī, known as al-Thaʻlabī (d. 427 AH / 1036 CE or 437 AH / 1045 CE), narrated this hadith, and reports related to it, in his *tafsīr* entitled *Kashf wa al-Bayān*.
4. Al-Balādhurī (d. 279 AH / 892 CE), the renowned historian, quoted the content of Ma'mūn's letter to the governor of Medina: 'The Messenger of God bequeathed the land of Fadak to Fāṭimah. This was such a clear command that none of the descendants of the Prophet had any dispute about it and she [Fāṭimah] until the end of her life, continued to make claim to it.'[2]
5. Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz al-Jawharī, the author of *Saqīfah*, states: 'During the reign of ʻUmar ibn ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz, his first act of redressing an injustice was to return Fadak to Ḥasan ibn Ḥasan ibn ʻAlī.'[3] This demonstrates that Fadak was Fāṭimah's legally owned property.
6. In addition to what has been mentioned, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd relates, on the authority of Abū Saʻīd al-Khudrī, the occasion of revelation (*sha'n al-nuzūl*) of the above quoted verse regarding Fadak. Although Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd cited this from Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's *Shāfī*, if the narrative were unsound, he would have certainly criticised it. Also, as can be surmised from Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's dialogue with a master of the western Muʻtazilī school of Baghdad, quoted in a chapter of *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, the latter believed that the Messenger had bequeathed Fadak to Fāṭimah.[4]
7. Al-Ḥalabī, in his *Sīrah*, mentions the matter of Fāṭimah's claim on Fadak and states: 'The caliph of that time issued Fadak's deed in Fāṭimah's name, but ʻUmar took it and tore it apart.'[5]

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[1] Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʻUmmāl*, vol. 2, p. 157 (the chapter on kinship).

[2] Al-Balādhurī *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 46; *Muʻjam al-Buldān*, vol. 4, p. 240.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 216.

[4] *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, pp. 268, 284.

[5] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, pp. 399–400.

8. Al-Mas'ūdī wrote in his work *Murūj al-Dhahab*: 'The Messenger's daughter discussed Fadak with Abū Bakr, demanding that it be returned to her. She brought forward 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Umm Ayman as her witnesses.'[1]
9. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī wrote: 'Fāṭimah went to Abū Bakr and said: "The Messenger granted Fadak to me"; the caliph required witnesses...' Then he concludes: 'During the caliphate of 'Umar [ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz], Fadak was returned to the Prophet's descendants, because the wealth of the Muslims had by then become abundant.'[2]

'Alī ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī, in his *Wafā' al-Wafā*, after narrating the discussion between Abū Bakr and Fāṭimah, writes: "Alī and Umm Ayman testified that the Messenger, during his lifetime, bequeathed Fadak to Fāṭimah'. He also states: 'During the reign of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, Fadak was returned to Fāṭimah's descendants.'[3]

A man from Syria met 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn and said: 'Introduce yourself'. 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn replied: 'Have you read in Sūrah al-Isrā', the verse: "*Give the near of kin their* [*due*] *right, and the needy and the traveller* [*as well*]" (17:26)?' and the man in acknowledgement of the implication said: 'It was because of the Prophet's kinship with them that God ordered his prophet to give them their due rights.'[4]

A number of great Shi'a scholars such as al-Kulaynī, al-'Ayyāshī, and al-Ṣadūq, while confirming that the above-cited verse was revealed with regard to the family of the Prophet, add that after the revelation of this verse the Prophet bequeathed Fadak to Fāṭimah.

In this regard a distinguished Shi'a scholar, Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, narrated eleven hadiths of authentic and remarkable sayings going back to eminent figures such as Imam 'Alī himself, Imam al-Sajjād, Imam Ja'far al-Ṣadiq, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim, and Imam al-Riḍā.[5]

However, there is near unanimity among the scholars that the verse of the Qur'an in question refers to the Prophet's family. But the fact that Fadak was given to Fāṭimah after the revelation of this verse is affirmed only by some from among the Sunni scholars (yet by all of the Shi'a traditionists).

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[1] Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 200.

[2] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 4, p. 238.

[3] 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-Wafā*, vol. 2, p. 160.

[4] *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 419.

[5] Ibid.

In addition to knowing the facts of the case, a proper recognition of the spiritual rank of the two parties involved in the dispute is essential if one is to discern the truth of the matter. In this disputed case the claimant and the plaintiff is the Prophet's beloved daughter Fāṭimah, whose spiritual station, rank, purity, and infallibility are well known to all. On the opposite side, is the leader of the ruling party, the caliph Abū Bakr, who, after the Prophet's death, held the reins of power; around him people gathered, some out of fear, others for greed.

Ten days after the Prophet passed away, the news reached Fāṭimah that Fadak had been taken over by the caliph's agents, and her workers had been dismissed. She went with a group of ladies of Banū Hāshim to the caliph to retrieve her property. The following dialogue took place:

> Fāṭimah: Why did you dismiss my workers and why have you deprived me of my rights?
>
> The caliph: I heard from your father that the prophets do not leave any inheritance!
>
> Fāṭimah: But it was during his lifetime that my father bequeathed Fadak to me.
>
> It was my legally owned property during my father's lifetime.
>
> The caliph: Do you have any witnesses to this?
>
> Fāṭimah: Yes, I do. 'Alī and Umm Ayman.

Then, at Fāṭimah's request, those witnesses testified.

While many writers mentioned these two witnesses, several also mentioned that there were another two, namely, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Al-Mas'ūdī[1] and al-Ḥalabī[2] narrated this. Fakhr al-Rāzī also said that one of the Prophet's servants testified to Fāṭimah's claim too, but did not give the name of this person.[3] Al-Balādhurī, however, did mention this servant's name as Ribāḥ.[4]

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[1] Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, chapter on the commencement of the Abbasids.

[2] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 40.

[3] Fakhr al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, p. 125, commenting on Sūrah al-Ḥashr; see also *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, p. 93, the narration on the authority of *Kharā'ij*.

[4] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 43.

From a historical perspective these two narratives are not contradictory, because according to the historians, the caliph did not accept that the testimony of a man and a woman sufficed as evidence to uphold a claim (to be discussed later); therefore, it is likely that Fāṭimah, in order to complete the number of witnesses, took her own sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, as well as the Prophet's servant Ribāḥ.

As stated by a number of hadiths found in Shiʿa sources, Fāṭimah had another witness, called Asmā' bint 'Umays. Also, the hadiths speak of a letter in which the Prophet confirmed Fāṭimah's ownership of Fadak and, as one would expect, to which Fāṭimah had referred as an additional item of evidence.[1]

'Alī, after bearing witness, made the caliph aware of his error. For the caliph had demanded witnesses from the person who was already in possession of the disputed land, and this is the very opposite of what should happen according to Islamic legal precepts. Therefore, 'Alī asked him: 'If I were to claim a property which is possessed by a Muslim, from whom is a witness required? From me, as the claimant, or from the person who is in possession of the property?' The caliph replied: 'I would demand a witness from you.' Then 'Alī said: 'For a long time, Fadak has been in our possession and at our disposal; now that some Muslims are claiming that Fadak is public property, you must demand witnesses from them, not from us!' The caliph was silenced by the logic of this irrefutable remark.[2]

The Caliph's Responses

Historical sources report a number of different accounts as regards the caliph's response to Fāṭimah. It can be surmised that the caliph gave different responses to Fāṭimah's various approaches and claims regarding Fadak. The following are possible responses made by the caliph to Fāṭimah's claims:

Firstly, when Fāṭimah's witnesses testified in her favour, 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah testified in favour of the caliph and said: 'After providing for the needs of his own family, the Prophet would spend the remainder of Fadak's revenue for the public interest. If Fadak was the personal property of his daughter, then why would he spend some portion of its income on others?'

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[1] *Bihār al-Anwār* (Kumpānī's edition), vol. 8, pp. 93, 105.

[2] Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj* (Najaf edition), vol. 1, p. 122.

This contradiction and contrasting testimony caused the caliph to confirm the rectitude of both parties: 'Both parties are right: 'Alī and Umm Ayman are telling the truth just as 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah are. For Fadak, which was at the disposal of Fāṭimah, was in fact the property of the Prophet. After providing for the needs of his family, he would distribute among the Muslims the revenue remaining. I shall do as the Prophet did.' At this point the Prophet's daughter said: 'I am also ready to spend the additional income for the welfare of Islam'. The caliph replied: 'I shall be doing this job instead of you!'[1]

Secondly, the caliph considered the number of Fāṭimah's witnesses to be insufficient for proving the case, and said: 'The testimony of one man and one woman is not acceptable; either two men or one man and two women should testify.'[2] The Shi'as regard the caliph's rejection of Fāṭimah's witnesses as an extremely painful judgement: the testimonies of 'Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn were rejected because they were members of Fāṭimah's family; that of Umm Ayman was rejected because she was a handmaiden of Fāṭimah and, finally, the evidence given by Asmā' bint 'Umays was also refused for the reason that she had once been the wife of the deceased brother of 'Alī, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib. Consequently, the caliph refused to return Fadak to Fāṭimah.[3]

Thirdly, the evidence provided by Fāṭimah was accepted as sufficient proof of her claim, so a deed was composed in her name, but at the insistence of 'Umar, the caliph put it to one side and ignored it. Ibrāhīm ibn Sa'īd al-Thaqafī wrote the following in his book, *Ghārāt*:

> After producing witnesses, the caliph decided to return Fadak to the Prophet's daughter. Hence, he wrote a title deed of Fadak in Fāṭimah's name. Fāṭimah left the house and on the road she met 'Umar. 'Umar became aware of the deed and demanded it from Fāṭimah. Then 'Umar went to the caliph and said: 'You have given Fadak to Fāṭimah, while 'Alī

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 216.

[2] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 400; *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, vol. 43; *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 4, section on Fadak.

[3] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, p. 105.

> testified for his own benefit and Umm Ayman is only a woman'; then he tore up the deed.'[1]

This event reflects the weak personality of the caliph, and shows how much his judgements were dependent on others' whims. Al-Ḥalabī, however, has reported a different version of this event: 'The caliph verified Fāṭimah's ownership, but 'Umar suddenly entered and asked: "What is this letter?" The caliph replied: "I have verified Fāṭimah's ownership"; 'Umar said: "But you need Fadak's income: if the Arab pagans revolt against Muslim rule, how would you pay for the war?" Then he took the deed and tore it.'[2]

At this point our research regarding the facts of the Fadak case draws to an end. The historical facts of this long-standing issue of fourteen centuries have been systematically presented. Now we should examine the verdict on this case according to the laws and traditions of Islam.

The Final Verdict on Fadak

The final verdict on Fadak shall be dealt with in the following chapter where we will demonstrate that the withholding of Fadak from the Prophet's daughter was the first major violation of a person's right to be recorded in the annals of Islamic judicial law. However, we shall restrict ourselves at this juncture to making the following points.

It is important to point out that in our previous discussion, we proved through clear arguments that after the revelation of the verse: '*Give the near of kin their* [*due*] *right, and the needy and the traveller* [*as well*]' (17:26), the Messenger bestowed Fadak upon Fāṭimah. In addition to many Sunni scholars, such eminent Shi'a scholars as al-'Ayyashī, al-Irbilī, and Sayyid al-Baḥrānī have verified this fact in their works; in this regard we can cite the following hadith:

Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq narrated: 'When the verse "Give the near of kin their [due] right" was revealed, the Prophet asked the Archangel Gabriel: "Who are the near of kin?" Gabriel replied: "Your family". Then the Prophet called Fāṭimah and her offspring to him, and granted Fadak to them. He said: "God has commanded me to bestow Fadak upon you.""[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 274.

[2] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 400.

Reply to a Question

It might be asked: Sūrah al-Isrā' is a Meccan chapter of the Qur'an, while Fadak came under the control of Muslims in 7 AH; how is it possible that a verse revealed in Mecca should be revealed in relation to an event that was to take place several years later?

The reply to this question is clear: the *sūrahs* are referred to as Meccan or Medinan insofar as the majority of their verses were revealed either in Mecca or Medina, respectively. In many Meccan *sūrahs* there are verses revealed in Medina, and vice versa. By referring to the commentaries of verses and their occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), this point is easily resolved. Furthermore, the content of the mentioned verse clearly verifies that this verse was a Medinan one, because in Mecca, the Prophet had no wealth to be able to give to 'the near of kin, the orphans, and the wayfarers'. Also, according to the commentators, not only this verse, which is the twenty-sixth of Sūrah al-Isrā', but also verses 32, 33, 57, as well as verses 73–81 were revealed in Medina.[2]

More Pages for the File on Fadak

Given the fact that the case for Fadak was so clear, why was the daughter of the Prophet not given a fair judgement? In the previous chapter we established the case and the claims of the two parties on the authority of reliable Islamic sources; now, we should examine the content of the case to be able to arrive at a proper judgement. Any objective judgement of the case, viewed from any legitimate angle by an unprejudiced judge, would lead to a verdict being made in favour of the daughter of the Prophet.

We turn now to an evaluation of the principal features of the case.

1. As can be surmised from the dialogue of the caliph with his close companion, Fadak was confiscated for basically political purposes: the shoring up of the caliphate in the face of its opponents. The saying quoted by the caliph to the effect that the prophets do not leave inheritance was an excuse aimed at legitimising the

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[1] Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 287.

[2] Al-Suyūṭī, *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 4, pp. 176–177.

confiscation of Fadak in religious terms. In support of this claim is that the caliph, having heard Fāṭimah's arguments, became convinced of the veracity of her claim, so much so that he drew up a deed to the property in her name; it was only after the intervention of 'Umar, who asked the caliph how he would pay for the military costs of war should the tribes rebel against the caliphate, that the caliph changed his mind and tore up the deed.[1] This shows clearly the real motive for the expropriation of Fadak, whatever veil be drawn over this reality, and it eliminates all lingering historical queries.

2. Many historians and traditionists reported that when the verse '*Give the near of kin their* [*due*] *right, and the needy and the traveller* [*as well*]' (17:26) was revealed, the Prophet bequeathed Fadak to Fāṭimah. The transmission chain of this hadith goes back to the well-known companion of the Prophet, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī. To verify such an important matter, should the caliph not have deemed it necessary to call Abū Sa'īd to confirm the hadith? Not only was Abū Sa'īd not an unknown or unreliable person, he was a prominent companion of the Prophet. Hence it is inconceivable that any genuine Islamic traditionist should fabricate a narrative and attribute it to Abū Sa'īd. Moreover, the number of such honest traditionists who narrated this hadith is enough to remove any doubt from the matter.

Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī was an authoritative figure in the field of hadith, a major source, through whom a large number of narratives were transmitted. The deep enmity of some people like Abū Hārūn al-'Abdī and 'Abd Allāh 'Alqamah to the Prophet's household was brought to an end after they consulted with Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī.[2]

3. According to the precepts of Islamic law – and of the laws of different nations throughout the world – any possessor of a property is to be regarded as the rightful owner thereof, unless proved otherwise. In case a claimant lays claim to a property which actually belongs to someone else, two just witnesses are required to testify against the owner of the property. Otherwise the court recognises the present owner and not the claimant as being the

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[1] Al-Ḥalabī, *Sīrah*, vol. 3, p. 400 quoting from Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī.

[2] *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, vol. 10, pp. 84–85.

lawful owner of the property. There is no doubt that when Fadak was confiscated, the land was in Fāṭimah's possession and her labourers were working there.[1] Despite such glaring evidence, Fāṭimah's ownership was denied and her appointed representative and workers were dismissed by the caliph.

Insult was added to injury when the caliph, instead of calling for the plaintiff to bring witnesses in support of his claim, called the owner of the property for witnesses. In terms of Islamic law the burden of proof falls on the claimant who does not currently possess the property being claimed, not on the person currently occupying it. As we pointed above, 'Alī made the caliph aware of his error in terms of this legal principle.[2]

Moreover, historical evidence proves that Fāṭimah was the rightful owner of Fadak. In one of his letters to 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, his governor in Basra, 'Alī wrote: 'As regards all that is under the sky, all we possessed was Fadak, but a group of people became greedy for it, another group [the Imam and his household] closed their eyes to it. What an excellent judge God is.'[3]

One question, however, remains. Insofar as the daughter of the Prophet possessed the property and was being denied its rightful ownership, the only duty she had in relation to the claimant was to take a binding oath. So, why, when the caliph sought witnesses from her, did she bring witnesses along with herself?

The answer to this question is given implicitly in one of the sayings we have related of Imam 'Alī. It was only due to the pressure imposed upon her by the caliphal authorities that the daughter of the Prophet agreed to provide evidence; the family of the Prophet were perfectly aware, from the very beginning of their ownership over the property, that they had no need to provide any evidence in support of this ownership.

If it be supposed that the daughter of the Prophet had brought witnesses even before the caliph had asked for them, it was because Fadak was not a village close to Medina such that its owner or the agent of the owner was well known. Rather, it was a distance of 140 km from Medina. So, it is possible that Fāṭimah was convinced that the caliph would require witnesses, and so for this reason brought these witnesses with her when she made her claim.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 211.

[2] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 122.

[3] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Letter 40.

4. There is no doubt that the daughter of the Prophet was immune to any kind of impurity and sin, according to the verse of purification (*taṭhīr*): '*Indeed, God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification*' (33:33). 'Ā'ishah, narrated a hadith confirming that this verse was addressed to the family of the Prophet; also many Sunni sources verify that the verse was revealed in relation to Fāṭimah, 'Alī, and their sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. As Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad* narrated: 'After the revelation of this verse, every time the Messenger of God left his house for the dawn prayer, he would pass by Fāṭimah's house calling out "*al-ṣalāh!*" (the prayer!) and then he would recite this verse. This continued for a period of six months.'[1]

Bearing in mind that there was no claimant against Fāṭimah except the caliph, was it necessary to demand witnesses from the daughter of the Prophet? Was it appropriate to ignore what the Qur'an says about the purity of Fāṭimah and her being protected against all kind of sin, and demand that she provide witnesses? The caliph should have applied the following two verses to the case in question, closing therewith the file of Fadak by adjudicating in favour of Fāṭimah: (a) '*when you judge between people, judge with fairness*' (4:58); and (b) '*Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and do justice thereby*' (7:180).

According to the above verses, a judge in a court must adjudicate justly on the basis of the truth. Since Fāṭimah was protected against all sin, and thus could not possibly lie, her claim must be at one with the truth, and thereby in accordance with justice – that by which the court must abide. Why then did the caliph give a verdict against Fāṭimah, going against the clear import of the above two verses, which form the basis of the Islamic judicial framework?

Some commentators refer to the above verses of Qur'an, interpreting them to probably mean that the judge must act according to the principles of Islamic justice, even if it flies in the face of actual justice! This manner of interpreting the two verses, however, is most implausible, and the plain meaning of the verses is that which we have given above.

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[1] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 295.

5. In the record of the life of the first caliph it is clear that, on many occasions, he accepted personal claims without sufficient evidence. For example, when some properties were sent by 'Alā' al-Haḍramī to the Muslims for the public treasury, Abū Bakr called out to the people: 'Anybody to whom the Prophet owed something, let him come forward'. A person called Jābir went to the caliph and said: 'The Prophet promised to help me with some money'; and the caliph gave him 3,500 dirhams. Abū Sa'īd said: 'When this news spread, a group of people went to the caliph and received financial help. One of them was Abū Bishr al-Māzinī, who went to the caliph and said: "The Prophet told me that any time he would receive money, I can go to him", following which Abū Bakr gave him 1,400 dirhams.'[1]

One may well ask: how is it that any claim was acceptable to the caliph, without any witnesses being required, but when it came to the Prophet's daughter he refuses to accept her claim, using the insufficiency of her evidence and arguments as an excuse? Why does a judge who is so generous as to accept all claims made in relation to the Prophet's possible promises and grants become so miserly when it comes to the beloved daughter of the Prophet? The answer is given precisely by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's teacher, the renowned scholar, 'Alī ibn Fār, who was living in Baghdad:

> I asked my master: 'Was Fāṭimah truthful in her claim?'
>
> 'Yes', he replied.
>
> 'Did the caliph know that she was truthful?' I asked.
>
> 'Yes', he replied.
>
> 'Why did he not give her what was her right then?' I asked.
>
> At this, my master smiled and with great dignity replied: 'If on that day, the caliph had returned Fadak to her, accepting her claim on the basis of her utter trustworthiness, without needing any witnesses to support her claim, she would then be in a position to take advantage of this precedent in favour of her husband 'Alī, claiming that the caliphate was his by right. The caliph would then have no choice but to hand over the caliphate to 'Alī, given her complete truthfulness – which he had already

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[1] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, p. 180; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, p. 134.

acknowledged. But in order to forestall any further demands and disputes, the caliph deprived Fāṭimah of her manifest right."[1]

The Case for Fadak is Complete

With such firm evidence in place, what were the factors which prevented a fair verdict from being passed on the case of Fadak? What was the reason for such an unjust judgement? It is clear that the caliph of the Muslims must be a guardian of the public interests and always uphold the welfare of the community. If, indeed, Fadak was really public property and only temporarily placed by the Prophet at the disposal of one of the members of his family, then, after the Prophet's death, it should have been transferred to the Prophet's successor for him to spend for the sake of the public interest. All can accept this inference. However, private property rights must also be respected by the ruling authorities: it is not in the public interest or in accordance with the welfare of the community for the rights of individual ownership to be violated, and for the state to declare as public property – or, in modern parlance, to 'nationalise' – property which clearly belongs to an individual.

The laws of Islam respect both private and public ownership. Just as the state has a duty to maintain public assets, so it must safeguard individual rights and lawfully obtained private property. For Islam formally recognises the rights of private ownership. Thus, the personal expropriation of public property in disregard of the public interest, violates the rights of the public; and conversely, the state's dispossession of the private property of an individual which has been lawfully acquired, is a violation of the rights of the individual. If Fāṭimah's claim to ownership of Fadak was in accordance with judicial criteria, and she had presented the requisite evidence and witnesses in support of her claim, such that in the eyes of the judge the case had no shortcomings – in such a situation, were the judge to fail to express the true verdict, or show any inclination contrary to the clear evidence presented in the claim, then this constitutes a major injustice condemned severely in the system of Islamic justice, and is also an act which is contrary to the general interest.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 284.

Some particular parts of the case of Fadak indicate clearly that the claim of the daughter of the Prophet was complete, and that the caliph should have judged in her favour.

Firstly, according to the historical sources, and as has been repeatedly affirmed already, after hearing the testimonies of Fāṭimah's witnesses the caliph decided to return Fadak to her, and wrote a deed in the name of Fāṭimah; however, 'Umar strongly disagreed with the caliph and tore up the document. In fact, this initial official recognition by the caliph of the rectitude of Fāṭimah's claim proves our assertion regarding the completeness of this claim; were this claim deficient in any respect, the caliph would never have considered drawing up an official deed for Fadak in the name of Fāṭimah.

Secondly, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ḥasan ibn 'Alī, Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, the Prophet's slave Ribāḥ, Umm Ayman, and Asmā' bint 'Umays all testified that, before his death, the Prophet had given Fadak to Fāṭimah. How is it possible that such witnesses were insufficient for Fāṭimah's claim? Let us suppose that Fāṭimah had brought only two witnesses to testify, namely, 'Alī and Umm Ayman: would these two alone not have been sufficient to verify the claim of the daughter of the Prophet? According to the purification (*taṭhīr*) verse of the Qur'an, one of these two witnesses, 'Alī, was infallible and unable to sin, a fact to which the Prophet also bore witness by saying: "Alī is with the Truth and the Truth is with him; 'Alī is the pivot of the Truth and the wheel of the Truth turns to wherever he turns'. Despite all this, 'Alī's evidence was not accepted by the caliph under the pretext that there must either be two women and one man, or else two men, as witnesses.

Thirdly, if the number of witnesses brought forth by Fāṭimah were insufficient, according to the Islamic law, the caliph was supposed to take an oath from Fāṭimah's regarding her claim. For the Islamic laws of property and debt provide the possibility of passing judgement on the basis of a single oath. Why did the caliph ignore this precept of the law on property, and resort instead to such disputes?

Fourthly, on the one hand the caliph confirmed the veracity of Fāṭimah's claim and the testimonies of her witnesses ('Alī and Umm Ayman), and on the other, also acknowledged the testimonies of 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah, who claimed that Fadak's revenues were distributed by the Prophet among the Muslims. Then he gave his verdict, saying: 'Yes, you are all correct. Fadak was public property, and the Prophet did distribute what was left of its revenues to the Muslims after he had met the needs of his family'. However, the caliph should have paid closer attention to what was actually said by 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah. For they did not say that Fadak was public property, they only testified that the Prophet used to distribute the remainder of Fadak's revenue among the Muslims after having paid for the needs of his family – an act which in no way contradicts the assertion that Fāṭimah was in fact the owner of the property. For the Prophet was allowed by Fāṭimah to distribute among the Muslims the remaining revenue accruing from Fadak after the family's needs were satisfied.

It is thus obvious, and goes without saying, that the initial prejudice of the caliph and his own hidden desire to confiscate Fadak led him to use the testimonies of 'Umar and Abū 'Ubaydah – which only proved that the remainder of the revenue of Fadak was distributed among the Muslims – to prove that Fāṭimah could not have been the owner of the property. Whereas, in truth, there is no discrepancy whatsoever between the testimony given by these two individuals and the fact that Fadak was indeed the private property of Fāṭimah.

What is most amusing is that the caliph promised Fāṭimah that he would follow the same method as the Prophet did as regards Fadak! If Fadak were public property, why would the caliph have sought to reassure Fāṭimah? And if Fadak were the private property of Fāṭimah, the caliph could not, through making such a promise, render lawful the dispossession of the true owner of the property.

Even if one supposes that the caliph did not consider himself able to give Fāṭimah the property on his own authority, he could always have obtained the approval of the Migrants and the Helpers and, on that basis, allow Fadak to remain in Fāṭimah's hands. Why did he not do this, and instead act in such a way as to plant such anger against him in the heart of Fāṭimah?

An analogous situation arose during the lifetime of the Prophet, and he solved the problem by means of establishing the agreement of the Muslims. During the Battle of Badr, Abū al-'Āṣ, the Prophet's son-in-law (Zaynab's husband), was captured along with seventy others by the Muslims and became a prisoner of war. The Messenger announced that their relatives could ransom them upon payment of certain sums of money. Abū al-ʿĀṣ was a wealthy trader in Mecca, who had married the Prophet's daughter before the advent of Islam. After the prophetic mission began, unlike his wife Zaynab, he refused to embrace Islam. So, at the Battle of Badr, he was in the enemy camp, and was captured by the Muslims. To release him, his wife Zaynab who at the time was living in Mecca, offered her necklace, which was given to her as a wedding gift by her mother Khadījah. When the Prophet saw the necklace he wept, remembering how his wife, Khadījah, had sacrificed everything during the most difficult period of his life, and spent her entire wealth for the spread of Islam. In order to uphold the right of the Muslims as a community – the right of public ownership – he addressed his companions as follows: 'This necklace belongs to you, and is at your disposal; if you wish, you can give up this necklace and release Abū al-ʿĀṣ, without need of any ransom.' The companions all agreed and accepted this suggestion.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes as follows:

> I read the story of Zaynab to my master, Abū Jaʿfar al-Baṣrī al-ʿAlawī who confirmed it and added: 'Was Fāṭimah's rank not higher than that of Zaynab? Would it not have been appropriate for the caliphs to have brought joy to Fāṭimah's heart by giving her Fadak, even if it were public property?'
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> I asked: 'According to the hadith which affirms that the prophets do not leave anything as inheritance, Fadak belonged to all of the Muslims; how was it possible to grant such property to the Prophet's daughter?' My master said: 'Did not Zaynab's necklace, which was sent as a ransom for releasing Abū al-ʿĀṣ, also belong to all of the Muslims?'
>
> I replied: 'The Prophet was the law giver himself, authorised by God to pronounce legal decrees, while the caliphs lacked such authority.'
>
> In response he said: 'I do not mean that the caliphs should take Fadak by force from the Muslims and hand it over to Fāṭimah; rather, I am asking why the rulers of the time did not seek the approval of the Muslims for the return of Fadak to her. Why did they not follow the precedent of the Prophet with regard to Zaynab's necklace and say to the Muslims: "O people, Fāṭimah is the daughter of your prophet. She would like to have

the orchard of Fadak at her disposal, as she did in the time of the Prophet. Are you ready to return Fadak to her, out of good will?"'

In the face of such a strong argument, I had no more to say to my master except these words, by way of confirmation of what he had said: 'Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār also criticised the caliphs regarding this matter, and said that although their judgement was made according to the law, her rank and the respect due to her were disregarded by them.'[1]

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[1] Ibid., vol. 14, p. 161.

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Do the Prophets not Leave Inheritance?

The Perspective of the Qur'an on this Question

Abū Bakr justified his appropriation of Fāṭimah's inheritance from her father in terms of a hadith, the content of which according to the view of the caliph was that the prophets do not leave inheritance, but whatever they leave behind is to be treated as charity. Before quoting this hadith, it is appropriate to judge its authenticity by applying to it the touchstone of the Qur'an, which is the ultimate criterion for evaluating the reliability of hadiths and distinguishing between those which are sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and those which are spurious. If the hadith is not confirmed by the Qur'an, one cannot regard it as being sound, even if the person narrating it be Abū Bakr, but is to be rejected as a fabrication.

According to the Qur'an and the Islamic laws of inheritance, it is not permitted to make an exception for the prophets and the heirs when it comes to the universal applicability of the laws of inheritance. If there be no definitive reasons for restricting the scope of the verses relating to inheritance, then the general precepts pertaining to inheritance govern the relationship between the prophets and their heirs.

In concrete terms, one may pose this question: why should the children of the prophets be deprived of their inheritance? Why should they not inherit their fathers' homes and properties once they have left this world? What sin have they committed that once their fathers have died, the children have to be driven from their homes?

Even though such deprivation of the heirs of the prophets appears unreasonable from the point of view of the intellect, if such deprivation

– together with the rule that whatever the prophets leave behind is declared to be charity for the community – were prescribed by some explicit provision of the revealed law, no doubt we would all be obliged to accept the hadith as being authenticated by the revealed precept in question; and we would have to do this with all due humility, ignoring the fact that such a precept appears irrational. But the heart of the matter is whether such a hadith was ever uttered by the Prophet.

Now, to evaluate the reliability of the hadith the best means is to examine its content in the light of relevant Qur'anic verses, and if it be corroborated by them, to put to one side any thoughts of denying it. In connection with the inheritance of the offspring of the prophets, there are two instances in the Qur'an where the self-evident principle of the inheritance of the prophets is mentioned.

Verse One: John the Baptist inherited the legacy of Zachariah

> *Indeed, I fear my kinsmen, after me, and my wife is barren. So, grant me from Yourself an heir who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, pleasing* [*to You*]*!* (19:6)

This verse is a clear indication to whomever is objective that Zachariah asked God for a son who would be his heir, because he feared his other relatives, and did not want to leave his property to them. The cause of his fear, however, shall be dealt with later on.

The Arabic word *yarithunī* (inherit from me) is derived from the verb meaning 'to inherit' (*waritha*), referring to concrete legacy left by a parent for his offspring. Of course, this does not mean that the same word cannot be used to describe intangible legacies, such as knowledge and prophethood,[1] but in the absence of some definitive indication specifying the legacy, one cannot ascribe the latter meaning to it. Now, in order to verify that the inheritance mentioned in the above verse simply refers to a legacy of material wealth, and not one of knowledge or prophethood, the following factors should be highlighted:

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[1] For example, '*Then, We made heirs to the Book those whom We chose from Our servants*' (35:32). It is obvious that the word 'Book' (*kitāb*) here is a clear indication that the legacy in question is not material wealth, but the legacy constituted by knowledge of the realities of the Qur'an.

1. The words *yarithunī* and *yarithu* simply refer to the inheritance of some wealth; any other interpretations need definitive and clear arguments and reasons. In the Qurʾan, apart from verse 32 of Sūrah Fāṭir, the verb in question, together with all its etymological derivatives is always used in reference to the inheritance of material wealth. This alone constitutes the best proof that the words in question must be interpreted according to their literal meaning.
2. Prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and messengership (*risālah*) are divine graces, granted to some specially chosen people who have given themselves to permanent spiritual endeavour, sincere devotion and selfless sacrifice. Such a grace cannot be inherited, but is rather the result of divinely determined criteria, such that those lacking the qualities in question cannot inherit these gifts, even if the inheritor is the son of a prophet.

Therefore, Zachariah could not ask for a son who would inherit his own prophethood and messengership. In confirmation of this, we can cite the following verse: '*God knows best where to place His apostleship*' (6:124).

3. Zachariah not only asked God for a descendant but for a praiseworthy heir who would guard his possessions. It is because the request is for an heir to his wealth that Zachariah asks God to '*make him [i.e. the heir], my Lord, pleasing [to You]*' (19:6), for it is possible that the heir to material wealth be unworthy. But if his supplication were for an heir to inherit his prophethood, it would be redundant to add the words, 'one with whom Thou art well-pleased': it is as if we were to pray to God to send a prophet who would be pure and pleasing to God! It is clear that such a supplication for a God-sent prophet – who, by definition, has attained all the qualities attendant upon the rank of prophethood – would be meaningless.
4. In his supplication, Zachariah said: '*I fear (what) my relatives (will do) after me*'; but what was the cause of such fear? Was the fear due to an inappropriate person attaining the rank of prophethood after his death, and thus he prays to God to bestow a son worthy to be a prophet? This is highly unlikely, because the Creator never bestows such a mission upon unworthy persons.

Or did he fear that his religion and guidance would be abandoned after his death, so that his community would stray from the straight path? This is also implausible because God will never deprive his servants of the grace of authentic guidance; His proofs and arguments will continuously be present; He never abandons his creatures.

Furthermore, if Zachariah's intention was to pray for a prophet, then it would have sufficed to pray for a prophet to be sent to his people to prevent them from going astray in ignorance – whether this prophet be the son and heir of Zachariah or not. However, we see that Zachariah prayed for a son who would be his heir.

A Reply to Two Questions

Two questions might be posed in relation to this verse and our interpretation of it; and indeed certain Sunni scholars have done so. It is as well to address them here.

1. It was during his father's lifetime that John attained the station of prophethood, but he never inherited any of the wealth of his father, as he was martyred before his father's death. Consequently, the Arabic word *yarithunī* refers to a legacy of prophethood rather than one of wealth.

 Answer: The question needs a reply, whether the legacy in question be material wealth or prophethood; for even in the latter case, the very notion of 'inheriting prophethood' implies the acquisition of this station subsequent to the death of the person from whom the legacy is inherited. Thus, the question is equally pertinent to both points of view as regards the interpretation of these verses, and is not restricted only to an interpretation which maintains that the legacy in question is a material one.

The reply is that the supplication of Zachariah did not contain a specific request that his son should actually inherit his wealth; rather, his supplication consisted solely in this: that God should bestow upon him a son, and the aim which motivated this supplication for a son was that he be the heir of Zachariah. This supplication was granted by God, even though the motive of Zachariah (the desire to have an heir) was not achieved.

Three sections in 19:6 help elucidate this point: (a) So, grant me from Yourself an heir; (b) who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob; (c) and make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]. The first and the third sections contain the actual requests and thus constitute the supplication as such. That is, he was actually asking that God bestow upon him a righteous son, with whom God will be pleased; and the aim behind this request – its ulterior motive, as it were – was that this son be his heir.

In fact, what Zachariah had requested from God was granted him, even though the aim underlying the request – that this son inherit from him after his death, whether the legacy in question be prophethood or material property – was not realised.[1]

We may cite another verse of the Qur'an in support of our interpretation that inheritance was not in fact the object of the supplication, but rather was the object hoped for, or intended by, Zachariah in making the supplication. In the following verse from the Sūrah Āl 'Imrān, Zachariah is making his supplication, and there is no mention of inheritance: *'Thereat Zachariah supplicated his Lord. He said, "My Lord! Grant me a good offspring from You! Indeed, You hear all supplications"'* (3:38). As can be seen, this supplication does not refer to an heir but an heir is nonetheless implied by the phrase 'pure progeny' (*dhurriyyah ṭayyibah*). In Sūrah Maryam the word *waliyyan* is used instead of *dhurriyyah*, and *raḍiyyan* instead of *ṭayyibah*.

2. The second objection that might be made here is this: in the verse in question, Zachariah's son had to inherit both from his father, and the household of Ya'qūb (Jacob), as it is mentioned '*So, grant me from Yourself an heir who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob*' (19:6). Surely, if he is to be the heir of all the descendants of Ya'qūb, the legacy in question can only be one of prophethood, not material property.

Answer: The import of the verse is not that the son of Zachariah should be the heir of the whole family of Jacob; rather, the intended meaning here, in light of the word *min* (from), is 'from among' the progeny of Jacob, not from all of them. Our position is then upheld if Jacob were to inherit from his mother or from any other single member of the family of Jacob. Whether the reference is to Jacob son of Isaac or another person is not relevant to this discussion.

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[1] Some readers (*qurrā'*) of the Qur'an have read *yarithunī* as a *majzūm* (conditional) construct, and as a consequence of the fulfilment of the imperative *hab*; the sentence thus coming to mean: 'if Thou grant unto me a son, he will be my heir' (*in tahab waliyyan yarithnī*).

Verse Two: David's inheritance from Solomon

Solomon inherited from David (27:16).

This verse unequivocally establishes the fact that Solomon inherited David's wealth and was the heir to this throne. To imagine that the above verse refers to a legacy of knowledge can be denied on two grounds: Firstly, the word *waritha* simply means 'inherited' or to become the owner of some wealth after another has died. Thus, to interpret it as a 'legacy of knowledge' without definitive and specific indications in the text is unacceptable, as it contradicts the literal meaning of the words.

Secondly, knowledge is acquired from a teacher and not by inheritance; it is of course possible to say figuratively that 'somebody inherited his master's knowledge'. However, prophethood and divine knowledge is a gift from God, it is neither susceptible to personal acquisition nor can it be bequeathed as a legacy. So, it is incorrect to say that a person inherited his prophethood and knowledge from his father, because prophethood is bestowed by God, not by one's father.

Furthermore, in the verse preceding 27:16, God says: '*Certainly, We gave David and Solomon knowledge, and they said, "All praise belongs to God, who granted us an advantage over many of His faithful servants"*' (27:15). It is evident that the literal meaning of this verse is that God granted knowledge and wisdom to both of them; so Solomon's knowledge was a divine gift and not inherited.

In the light of these verses (19:6 and 27:16), it can be proven beyond doubt that the divine law did not prohibit previous prophets from having heirs. Rather, just as other offspring inherit from their parents, the children of the prophets can also inherit from their parents.

This clear evidence of inheritance from prophets given by the verses on the inheritance of Solomon and John from their parents was invoked by Fāṭimah when she delivered her fiery sermon in the mosque. She succinctly refuted the basis of the argument made against her in the following words:

> *This is the Book of God, decisive, just, rational, and discerning, which says: 'So, grant me from Yourself an heir who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob* (19:6)'; '*Solomon inherited from David*' (27:16).[1]

The Hadith Narrated by Abū Bakr

The above discussion on the Qur'anic verses clearly proves that the offspring of the prophets may inherit from their parents, and refutes the argument that the legacy of the prophets becomes alms after their death which must be distributed among the needy. It is now appropriate to evaluate the hadiths which have been narrated by Sunni scholars in their effort to justify the first caliph's act in depriving the daughter of the Prophet of her inheritance.

The hadiths in question must first be cited:

1. 'We prophets do not leave gold and silver, land and houses behind, but we leave behind us faith and wisdom, knowledge and exemplary traditions.'
2. 'The prophets do not leave inheritance'.
3. 'Indeed, the Prophet does not leave inheritance'.
4. 'We do not leave any inheritance; what we leave behind is charity (*ṣadaqah*)'.

These are the hadiths narrated by Sunni scholars. It was on the fourth of the above sayings that the first caliph based his decision to withhold from Fāṭimah her inheritance. There is also a fifth hadith narrated by Abū Hurayrah, but, since what he has narrated is known to be fabricated (to the extent that the author of *Saqīfah*, Abū Bakr al-Jawharī, deemed it a less widespread hadith), there is no need to cite it here.[2]

With respect to the first hadith, we would say that it does not mean that the prophets do not leave inheritance, but that it is below their dignity to spend their holy lives on gathering wealth in order to leave this as an inheritance for their heirs; that by which they should be remembered is not gold or silver, rather, their true legacy is knowledge, wisdom, and exemplary traditions. This does not allow one to say: since the prophets spent their lives striving to impart guidance, living abstemiously and frugally, after their death whatever they may have acquired must therefore be immediately distributed as charity, as 'the prophets do not leave any inheritance'.

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[1] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj* (Najaf edition), vol. 1, p. 145.

[2] See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 220.

To make this even clearer: the aim of this hadith is that the communities and the heirs of the prophets should not expect the latter to leave behind legacies of material wealth, for that is not their purpose. Rather, they have been raised up as prophets in order to impart to mankind true religion, revealed laws, knowledge, and wisdom; these are the tokens by means of which they will be remembered. There is a hadith narrated through a number of Shi'a scholars, on the authority of Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, which upholds what we have just affirmed, showing what the real aim of the prophets was:

> Verily, the *'ulamā'* (the scholars/the knowledgeable), are the heirs of the prophets, because they [the prophets] do not leave behind dirhams and dinars, rather, they leave traditions (*aḥādīth*) among [the plenitude of] their traditions.[1]

The aim of this and similar sayings is to affirm that it is not for the prophets to gather and transmit wealth as their legacy; instead, it is proper to their dignity that the essence of their legacy be identified with the religion and knowledge established for their communities. Such a principle does not in any way imply, however, that what they do leave behind by way of material wealth should not be inherited by their heirs.

In the light of this explanation, one can see that the same argument applies as regards the meaning intended by the second and third hadiths, even if they have been narrated in a more condensed form. In reality, it is but one saying that is in question, which, in the process of transmission, underwent modification and abridgement.

Up to this point, the first three sayings have been addressed and clearly interpreted. Their apparent contradiction with the verses of the Qur'an which establish that prophets do leave inheritance has been resolved. It is in relation to the fourth saying that a certain difficulty arises. Our argument cannot be applied to it, as it clearly designates as charity (*ṣadaqah*) that which the prophets leave behind them.

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[1] Introduction to *Ma'ālim*, p. 1; quoted from al-Kulaynī.

The point that should be made first of all is that if this saying establishes a principle that is universally applicable, that is, in relation to all of the prophets, then this is in clear contradiction to the Qur'an, thus its authenticity is disproved. If, however, the principle applies only to the prophet of Islam (such that he alone among the prophets is not permitted to leave any inheritance) then, even if it does not contradict the Qur'an in terms of the principle of general applicability, if one wishes to act on the basis of such a hadith (which runs contrary to a whole series of Qur'anic verses relating to inheritance and its division among heirs, and which are of universal import and thus apply to the prophet of Islam also), then it can only be justified if it has such a high degree of authenticity that it can be accepted as a form of specification (*takhṣīṣ*) of the general principle, or an exception to the rule, as established in the Qur'an. Unfortunately, this saying, upon which the first caliph relied, does not possess such authenticity, as will be demonstrated in what follows.

1. Among the Prophet's companions, the first caliph is the sole narrator of this hadith; that is, he is the one and only (*mutafarrid*) narrator. This fact is so well known to traditionists and historians that Ibn Ḥajar regarded this as a sign that Abū Bakr was the most learned of the companions![1] The only historical evidence involving a few of the other companions who were aware of this hadith is related to an argument between 'Alī and 'Abbās regarding the Prophet's inheritance.[2] 'Umar, in his capacity as a judge, narrated this hadith on the authority of the first caliph, and five of the companions present in that session confirmed the authenticity of such a hadith.[3]

As Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes: 'Abū Bakr was the one and only narrator of this hadith. No one narrated it except himself. It has sometimes been said that Mālik ibn Aws also reported this hadith. Also, during the caliphate of 'Umar, a few of the Migrants verified its authenticity.'[4]

So, one might ask, is it correct for the first caliph, who was himself a party to the dispute, to narrate a hadith which no one had any knowledge of, but him alone? One might argue that a judge in an arbitration case can indeed rely and act upon his own knowledge and wisdom in order to resolve a dispute; so if the caliph had heard this saying from the Prophet himself, he could judge according to it, and restrict and specify (through *takhṣīṣ*) the general principle established in the Qur'an with regard to the inheritance of prophets. However, the caliph's contradictory actions, his hesitations, and his indecisiveness regarding the return of Fadak – changing his mind once he had decided to allow Fāṭimah to retain it, as has been demonstrated in detail above – is a sure sign that he was not absolutely certain that the Prophet did indeed utter this saying.

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[1] *Ṣawā'iq*, p. 19.

[2] Shi'a sources do not accept the Sunni version of this narration concerning the argument between 'Alī and 'Abbās.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 229; *Ṣawā'iq*, p. 21.

[4] Ibid., p. 227.

It is thus not convincing to try and argue that the caliph applied his own knowledge and used the hadith in question to specify and restrict the general Qur'anic principle regarding the inheritance of the prophets and, in so doing, deprive the daughter of the Prophet of the legacy left to her by her father.

2. If God had decreed that the Prophet's inheritance was to be given away as charity to the Muslims, then why did the Prophet himself not mention this to his sole heir? Is it reasonable to suppose that the Prophet could have concealed such an important decree from his daughter? Or did the Prophet disclose it to his daughter only for her to ignore it subsequently? Such scenarios are inconceivable, especially given the fact the Prophet and his daughter were purified of all sin, and infallible. Thus, one must, on the contrary, take Fāṭimah's denial as being positive evidence that the precept invoked against her was in fact not derived from any legal or revealed injunction; and that the hadith in question is a forgery motivated by political considerations, by means of which the daughter of the Prophet was deprived of her lawful inheritance.
3. If the hadith was an authentic one we should ask why did the ownership of Fadak oscillate back and forth, falling prey to the changing winds of political fortune, its ownership being transferred again and again, according to the inclinations of succeeding caliphs? History reveals that the status of Fadak was never stable under the rule of the caliphs, some of them returning Fadak to its rightful owners, and others re-appropriating it. Fadak has

> remained a thorny issue for Islam and the Muslims, a sensitive unsolved problem inherited by each succeeding generation.[1]

During the caliphate of 'Umar, Fadak was returned to 'Alī and Abbās,[2] but, when 'Uthmān became caliph, Fadak was under Marwān's ownership. During the rule of Mu'āwiyah and after Ḥasan ibn 'Alī's passing away, Fadak was divided between Marwān, 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān, and Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah. During Marwān's caliphate, Fadak was completely under the control of Marwān. Then he granted it to his son, 'Abd al-'Azīz. 'Abd al-'Azīz in turn granted it to his son, 'Umar, who returned Fadak to Fāṭimah's descendants. During Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Mālik's rule, Fadak was confiscated by him and granted to the family of Marwān, who held on to the property, generation after generation, until the demise of the Umayyad dynasty.

Under Abbasid rule, Fadak again changed hands. Abū 'Abbās al-Saffāḥ returned Fadak to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥasan ibn 'Alī but Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr took it back. The Abbasid, Mahdī, returned it to Fāṭimah's descendants. Then Mūsā ibn Mahdī and his brother took it back, this situation remaining thus until the caliphate of Ma'mūn, who returned it to its rightful owners. But when Mutawakkil became caliph, Fadak was yet again taken back from its true owners![3] It is clear that if the hadith cited by the first caliph were indeed a sound one, then Fadak could not have been subjected to such a turbulent and ever-changing destiny.

4. The Prophet left property other than Fadak as inheritance, but all of the pressure of the first caliph was brought to bear on this one issue. For example, he left behind houses for his wives, which were left in their hands, without the caliph raising any objections or making any inquiries to ascertain whether these properties were bestowed by the Prophet upon his wives during his lifetime, or were left as inheritance for them after his death.

Abū Bakr not only failed to raise any such queries, he also sought permission from his own daughter, 'Ā'ishah, to be buried next to the

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[1] For further information and sources, see *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition), vol. 7, pp. 159–196.

[2] Although this contradicts 'Alī's letter to 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, as noted earlier: 'As regards all that is under the sky, all we possessed was Fadak, but a group of people became greedy for it, another group closed their eyes to it. What an excellent judge God is.' *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Letter 40.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, pp. 216–217.

Prophet, inasmuch as he considered his daughter to be the heir of the Prophet! Furthermore, not only did he not confiscate the houses of the Prophet's wives, he also left in the possession of ʿAlī the Prophet's sword, clothes, turban, ring, and horse. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd was so perplexed by such extraordinary conduct that he tried to justify the caliph's behaviour, but his attempt was so weak that it is not worth mentioning let alone criticising.[1] The question remains: was it exclusively the inheritance of Fāṭimah that was to be taken away, or the inheritance of all the Prophet's heirs? Was it not instead simply the case that none of the inheritance of the Prophet should have been taken away, and that the real reason why Fāṭimah was deprived of her inheritance was a political one?

5. If inheritance from prophets were strictly forbidden by Islamic law, why would the daughter of the Prophet – who was purified of all impurity, according to the verse of purification cited earlier – deliver the following fiery speech?

> O son of Abū Quḥāfah! Is it written in the Book of God that you can inherit from your father while I am not eligible to inherit from my father? You have brought something strange indeed! Or have you purposely abandoned the Book of God by throwing it behind your back...claiming that I cannot inherit from my father and that I am not his kin? Have you received some special revelation from God regarding this matter, such that my father is excluded from it [the laws of inheritance]? Or do you argue that followers of two different faiths cannot inherit from one another? Do my father and I not follow one religion? Or perhaps your knowledge of the Qur'an, its general principles, and its specifications, is greater than my father and my cousin?[2] Take this harnessed and adorned mount, which will confront you on the Day of Judgement. How excellent a judge is God, and how excellent a leader is Muḥammad. The Day of Judgement is appointed; on the Day of Resurrection falsehood shall be defeated.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 261.

[2] That is, ʿAlī, her 'cousin' by virtue of being the cousin of her father. [Translator]

[3] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iḥtijāj* (Najaf edition), vol. 1, pp. 138–139; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 251.

In the light of the vehemence of this speech, is it at all possible that the hadith cited by the caliph was authentic? What a strange law it is that is applied exclusively to the daughter and the son-in-law of the Prophet, a law which they themselves are unaware of, and the basis of which is a saying which an unrelated person alone should know?

Finally, let us reiterate some of the principal points of the argument.

1. The disagreement between Fāṭimah and the caliph had four aspects: (a) the question of the Prophet's legacy; (b) Fadak, which was bequeathed to Fāṭimah during the Prophet's lifetime, this being termed in Arabic a *niḥlah*;[1] (c) the share of the near of kin, mentioned in Qur'an 8:41; and (d) government (*ḥukūmah*) and guardianship (*wilāyah*).

All four points are mentioned in Fāṭimah's speech. The words *mīrāth* and *niḥlah* are both used in this context. The issue is extensively discussed in Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah.*[2]

2. A number of Shi'a scholars, such as Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, interpreted the aforementioned mentioned hadith ('we do not leave any inheritance, what we leave is charity'; *lā nuwarrithu mā taraknā ṣadaqah*), in such a manner as to reconcile it with Fāṭimah's right to inherit from her father. According to such scholars as Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, the meaning of this hadith is in fact quite different from the meaning conventionally ascribed to it. He analyses the saying as follows: the word *nuwarrithu* is obvious: 'we leave as inheritance'; the word *mā* (that which/what) is joined to it, and is the object (*maf'ūl*); and 'charity' is the circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*). The meaning of the saying thus becomes: whatever we leave behind as charity is not what we bequeath as inheritance. It is obvious that whatever was given as charity during the Prophet's lifetime cannot be regarded as part of his inheritance, and this is quite different from saying that the Prophet does not leave anything as inheritance for his heirs. This interpretation is not however free of problems insofar as it is not only the Prophet to whom the principle in question applies, rather, it is to every

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[1] This refers to the voluntary transfer of the ownership of a property from one person to another, without any payment being made for it. [Translator]

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 16, p. 230.

individual: whoever donates something as charity during his lifetime, by definition, has not left that same thing as inheritance.

3. Fāṭimah's sayings, whether in her fiery speech in the mosque or in her debates with the caliph, clearly express the fact that she was extremely unhappy with the situation, and very angry with her opponents, and remained thus to the day she died.

Fāṭimah's Anger

The debates between Fāṭimah and Abū Bakr remained unresolved and Fadak was taken from her. Fāṭimah left this world angry with the caliph. This is a historical fact which is so well known that nobody can deny it. As al-Bukhārī, the renowned Sunni traditionist, reports: 'When the caliph, relying upon a prophetic hadith, took Fadak from Fāṭimah, the latter became angry with him, and until the day she died she refrained from talking to him.'[1]

Ibn Qutaybah, in his *al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, reports as follows:

> 'Umar told Abū Bakr: 'We should go to Fāṭimah because we have made her angry'. They went to Fāṭimah's house and asked permission to enter. Fāṭimah refused to permit their entrance, until 'Alī mediated and they entered. But Fāṭimah turned her face aside and did not return their greetings. They tried to console her, and explain why they did not give Fadak to her. Fāṭimah replied: 'I adjure you by God, have you heard the Prophet say, "Fāṭimah's pleasure is my pleasure, her anger is my anger; Fāṭimah is my daughter, whoever loves her, loves me, whoever pleases her, pleases me; whoever angers her, angers me?"' Both affirmed that they had heard this saying.
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> Then Fāṭimah continued: 'God and His angels are my witnesses! You have made me angry and displeased me, and if I meet the Prophet I shall complain to him about you'. Abū Bakr said: 'I take refuge in God from the anger of the Prophet and from your anger.' Then he began to cry and said: 'I swear by God that I will supplicate for you after every

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[1] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, chapter on *farḍ al-khums*, vol. 5, p. 5; and *Kitāb al-Ghazawāt*, chapter on the Battle of Khaybar, vol. 6, p. 196; he added that Fāṭimah passed away six months after the Prophet's death. When she died, 'Alī buried her at night without informing the caliph.

> prayer'. After saying this, he left Fāṭimah's house, still weeping. The people gathered around him, and Abū Bakr said: 'Each night all of you sleep in a wholesome state, your minds at peace, while I have been made to do such an act on account of you! I have no need of your allegiance, release me from the caliphate!'[1]

A large number of traditionists have transmitted the hadith which was quoted above: 'Fāṭimah is part of me; whoever angers her, angers me.'[2]

May the peace of God be with her the day she was born, the day she died and the day she shall be raised up alive.

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[1] Ibn Qutaybah, *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 14. See also the scholarly evaluations of this event by al-Jāḥiz in his *Rasā'il*, p. 300.

[2] For the transmission chain of this hadith, see *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition), vol. 7, pp. 232–235.

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ʿAlī and the Council

The three caliphs, after the Prophet's demise, were each elected in different ways. A group of the Helpers gathered in Saqīfah Banū Sāʿidah and elected Abū Bakr, who then sought, either forcibly or peacefully, the allegiance of the Migrants. ʿUmar, the second caliph, was nominated by Abū Bakr as his successor. Finally, ʿUthmān was chosen as the third caliph through a *shūrā* (council) of six individuals whom ʿUmar had appointed. These three very different means of acceding to the caliphate would appear to show that the Prophet had not specified any particular means of determining the holder of the office of caliph, nor did he establish any explicit public process by which to elect his successors. The discrepancies that occurred are vivid proof of the principle that a caliph, or imam, must be appointed through divine ordinance. But, unfortunately, those people ignored the explicit instruction in the sayings of the Prophet, as in so many other instances, and led the society to elect caliphs by popular vote and since the selection of leaders in this way was quite new to them, it was done through different procedures.

Abū Bakr Repays ʿUmar

ʿUmar's effort to secure the election of Abū Bakr as the first caliph was made in order to secure for himself the position of second caliph. It was for this reason that ʿAlī remarked to him: 'Milk it well, as it will benefit you. Secure it well today for him [i.e. Abū Bakr], so that tomorrow he might return it to you!"[1] Hence, while sick on his deathbed, Abū Bakr expressed his gratitude to 'Umar by calling 'Uthmān and instructing him to write the following: 'This is the last will and testament of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Uthmān[2] to the Muslims, while in the last hour of his earthly life, preparing for the first stage of the hereafter – that very moment when every believer is actively engaged in proper conduct and contemplative reflection and every disbeliever is in a state of submission'. At this point, the caliph became unconscious. 'Uthmān thought that the caliph had passed away, so he continued to write and added the following passage: '...and he chooses Ibn Khaṭṭāb as his successor'. A few moments later, the caliph regained consciousness and 'Uthmān read to him the additional words. The caliph asked: 'Why did you write such a thing in my will?' 'Uthmān replied: 'I knew that you had no other intention except to nominate Ibn Khaṭṭāb.' Although this could be considered a diplomatic manoeuvre on his part, 'Uthmān's role should not be overlooked, for years later it would be the turn of 'Umar to repay the debt, this time, in 'Uthmān's favour, by appointing the latter as his successor.

Racial Discrimination and Class Division

One of the most meritorious and admirable principles of Islam, even at the present time, is its condemnation of all forms of racial discrimination and class division. This is based on the principle expressed in the Qur'an: '*The noblest of you in the eyes of God is the most pious of you*' (13:49). At the time of the Prophet, wages were not clearly determined. The living expenses of the majority of the Muslims were earned from the spoils of war. The spoils earned by fighting with the infidels – except one fifth (*khums*) of the total amount which was kept aside – were distributed among the warriors, regardless of their race, kinship, and precedence in Islam (*sābiqah*). This practice continued during the time of the first caliph. However, during the reign of the second caliph, some changes took place. The spread of Islam made it necessary for the second caliph to establish regular salaries for the Muslims. Unfortunately, however, the criteria for levels of salary were based on race, family, and class rather than merit and skills: the preference of Arabs over non-Arabs, Qaḥṭānī Arabs over 'Adnānī Arabs, Muḍar Arabs over Rabī'ah Arabs, Qurayshīs over non-Qurayshīs, and members of Banū Hāshim over members of Banū Umayyah. The salaries of certain persons and groups have been mentioned in the works of historians like Ibn Athīr, al-Ya'qūbī, and Jurji Zaydan.[1] The discrepancy between different salaries remains astonishing. For instance the salary of 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib was 12,000 dirhams per annum, while the wages of an Egyptian soldier did not exceed 300 dirhams per annum. In addition, the annual allowance of each of the Prophet's wives was 6,000 dirhams. Yet the wages for a Yemeni soldier did not reach 400 dirhams. The salary of Mu'āwiyah and his father, Abū Sufyān, remained 5,000 dirhams per annum. While an ordinary Meccan, who had not migrated, received 600 dirhams.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 12; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 5. A similar passage is found in the third sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (known as the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon): *la-shaddah mā tashaṭṭarā ḍar'ayhā*.

[2] This is the name of Abū Bakr, see *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 88.

Unfortunately, during the rule of the second caliph racial discrimination and class division, which had been condemned by the Qur'an and the Prophet, grew deeper; so the opportunists began exploiting the weak. Even though the caliph confiscated the wealth of a number of people like Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Abū Hurayrah, and others, due to erroneous economic plans and favouritism, his actions nonetheless failed to resolve the matter. Consequently, the opportunists had greater purchasing power to buy slaves. Such slaves were forced to hire themselves out to be able to give a few dirhams a day to their owners in return for their limited freedom.

Abū Lu'lu'

Fīrūz, known as Abū Lu'lu', was a Persian and a skilled workman, carpenter, artisan, and slave of Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah. He hired himself out as a carpenter and gave two dirhams a day to his owner in return for his limited freedom. One day in the bazaar, Abū Lu'lu' approached 'Umar and begged for relief, saying: 'The taxes Mughīrah is levying on me are more than I can bear'. 'Umar, after questioning him about how much his income was in proportion to the tax that Mughīrah was demanding from him, told Abū Lu'lu' that he was such a skilled workman that he was sure to earn a good wage; there was no need to reduce his obligation to his owner. Then the caliph said, 'I know you make windmills; make one for me as well'. In a sullen mood, Abū Lu'lu' said, 'Fine, I will make a mill for you – one that the whole world will talk about'. As Abū Lu'lu' left, the caliph told the people around him that the Persian slave had threatened him.

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[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 106; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 168; Jurji Zaydan, *Ta'rīkh*, translation of *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, vol. 1, p. 159ff.

At the end of his caliphate, 'Umar was acutely aware of the increasing oppression and exploitation of the weak within Muslim society at that time. He promised the people that if he lived for a further year he would try to establish closer contact with the people, knowing full well that many of the petitions would not in fact reach him. According to Dr. 'Alī Wardī's work, the second caliph remarked: 'My purpose in discriminating and giving priority to some was purely to win their hearts (*ta'līf al-qulūb*). If I live next year, I will eradicate discrimination and implement equality among all, regardless of race as was done by the Prophet and Abū Bakr.'[1] However, the caliph did not live long enough and Fīrūz's dagger cut short his desire. Unfortunately, discrimination continued and grew even deeper throughout the period of the third caliphate.

Firuz's dagger signified just the tip of the iceberg as regards the dissatisfaction simmering within a sector of the lower classes at that time. Many writers believe that the roots of racial and class discrimination within Islamic society were established during the period of the third caliphate, but in fact, the seeds of such discrimination were sown during the period of the second caliphate. The second caliph used to say: 'It is a disgrace for Arabs to raid each other, since God has provided vast *'ajam* (non-Arab) lands to be captured'.[2] He also said: 'The law of inheritance for the *'ajam* people can only apply on condition that they were born in Arab lands!'[3]

Another sign of racial discrimination was that non-Arab captives were not permitted to live in Medina, even though 'Umar had given Mughīrah special permission to send his slave, Abū Lu'lu', to Medina.[4] It is due to such discrimination, that the three Persians namely Fīrūz (Abū Lu'lu'), Prince Hurmuzān, and Fīrūz's daughter, Jufaynah, plotted the second caliph's assassination. The caliph was injured by Abū Lu'lu''s dagger and died after three days. Tasting the bitter fruit of the discrimination that he had allowed to take root, and during the final hours of his life, he was expected to select a capable and qualified successor. Instead he established the *shūrā* and deprived Muslim society of the most deserving and rightful leader. A man was elected by this council, one about whom the second caliph said: 'If this man succeeds: all his relatives will rule over the people!'

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[1] *Naqsh-i Wu''āẓ dar Islām*, p. 84.

[2] Jurji Zaydan, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 35.

[3] *Naṣṣ wa al-Ijtihād*, p. 60.

[4] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 42.

About this *shūrā* 'Alī once said (in the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon): 'By God, what a *shūrā*!' In any case, we will commence our narration of the whole process of 'Umar's *shūrā* with complete impartiality. Then we shall analyse the events that led to the most unpleasant periods of Islamic history: the eras of the Umayyads and Abbasids.

The Members of the Council

The caliph's death was imminent. He was frequently asked to choose a successor; a message from 'Ā'ishah through 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhayfah said: 'Do not leave Muḥammad's community without a shepherd; choose a successor without delay, as there is fear of calamity and chaos'.[1] 'Umar's son said to his father: 'If you called for the shepherd of your flock, would you not advise him to leave someone in charge of the flock to protect it from wolves?' Visitors to the dying caliph also reminded him of the need to have a successor. Some suggested his son 'Abd Allāh as a successor. The caliph, knowing his son's incompetence, refused their proposal and replied: 'From among the household of Khaṭṭāb, it is enough for this one to bear the responsibilities of the caliphate.'

'Umar summoned six prominent companions of the Prophet with whom the Prophet had been pleased and who were at the Prophet's deathbed. 'Umar then nominated them to appoint his successor. The six-member council, known as 'Umar's *shūrā*, comprised 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf. When they had gathered around the caliph's bedside, the caliph said: 'I suppose you all want to hold the reign of power?!' Then he proceeded to challenge all of them except 'Alī, and with sound reasoning, he made the point that none of them was worthy of assuming the caliphate. But to 'Alī, he remarked that throughout his life he could not trace any spot of weakness in 'Alī except for his sense of humour! He added that if 'Alī were to hold the reign of power, he would be a just ruler, leading the people to the straight path of Truth and Light. Finally, when addressing 'Uthmān, the caliph made the following remark: 'I can foresee that the Quraysh will choose you as their leader; you shall give power to the Banū Umayyah and the Banū Abī al-Mu'ayṭ and you will allow them to control the Muslim treasury (*bayt al-māl*). Then a group of angry Arabs will revolt against you. And in your house you shall be assassinated. If such events occur, remember these words of mine!'

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 22.

After this exclamation the caliph turned to the members of the *shūrā* and said: 'If you assist each other, you shall eat the fruit of the caliphate. But if you maintain jealousy and bitterness towards each other, Mu'āwiyah shall steal the caliphate!' At the end of his speech, the caliph called Muḥammad ibn Maslamah and said: 'After returning from my funeral with fifty armed men, invite these six men to a house. If it were to come to pass that five of them were in accord and one were not in favour, cut off that one's head; and if four were united and two against, kill the opposing two! But if these six were to find themselves divided into two equal groupings, the group with 'Abd al-Raḥmān would be the righteous one, in which case, encourage the opposing three to give their consent. If no agreement is reached then eliminate the second group. And after three days if the position remains the same, execute all six of them, and allow the Muslims to choose freely a candidate to be their rightful caliph.'

When the funeral participants had returned, Muḥammad ibn Maslamah accompanied by fifty swordsmen rounded up the six men in a house and informed them of 'Umar's instructions. Ṭalḥah, because of his opposition to 'Alī, chose 'Uthmān as candidate for the caliphate. It was obvious to him that between such personalities as 'Alī and 'Uthmān, there was no question of him ever acceding to the caliphate. Therefore, he chose 'Uthmān to reduce the possibility of 'Alī's succession to the caliphate. Ṭalḥah's opposition to 'Alī was rooted in tribal conflicts. Ṭalḥah, like Abū Bakr, was from the Taym tribe. After Abū Bakr's succession to the caliphate, relations between the Taym tribe and the Banū Hāshim increased in hostility and bitterness. Zubayr, who was 'Alī's cousin, vacated the post in favour of 'Alī. Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ withdrew in favour of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, because both were from the tribe of Zuhrah. As a result, the nominations were now reduced to three, each having amassed two votes. Victory belonged to the candidate who could win over one of the three. Understanding this, 'Abd al-Raḥmān turned to 'Alī and 'Uthmān and said:

'Which one of you is prepared to relinquish his rights for the other and vacate in his favour?' Silence filled the room. No one said anything for several seconds. 'Abd al-Raḥmān then continued: 'I abandon the caliphate so that one of you can be chosen'. Then he turned to 'Alī and said: 'I will give my allegiance to you, if you will base your actions upon the Book of God (*kitāb*), the prophetic tradition, and the conduct of the *shaykhayn* [i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar]'. 'Alī could not accept the last condition and so replied: 'I accept your conditional allegiance based on the *kitāb* and prophetic tradition, but I shall act according to my knowledge and my own reasoning (*ijtihād*).'

When 'Abd al-Raḥmān received 'Alī's negative reply, he then made the same proposition to 'Uthmān who instantly replied: 'I accept'. At that point 'Abd al-Raḥmān held 'Uthmān's hand aloft and greeted him as the 'commander of the faithful'. The decision of the meeting was then announced to the waiting people. 'Alī was fully aware of the decision the council would make from the very beginning. Ibn 'Abbās, upon hearing of the individuals constituting the *shūrā*, declared that 'Alī would be deprived of the caliphate for the third time. Consequently, when Ibn 'Awf played his role well by giving his support to 'Uthmān, 'Alī turned to 'Abd al-Raḥmān and said: 'Your choice of 'Uthmān in the hope that at the end of his life, 'Uthmān will pass on the caliphate to you, is fashioned according to 'Umar's way of establishing Abū Bakr as caliph. But we pray that God sows the seeds of disunity between you!' Historians reported that thereafter the relationship between Ibn 'Awf and 'Uthmān turned sour and so remained until 'Abd al-Raḥmān's death.[1]

This is a summary of the events of the *shūrā*. However, prior to any assessment of this chapter of Islamic history, it is necessary to reflect upon 'Alī's assessment of it as given in the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon. In this, the third sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, 'Alī remarks:

> At the time of his death, 'Umar installed the *shūrā* for the affairs of the caliphate, on the assumption that I was equal to the other members. O God, I seek Thine aid. What were the doubts about me, that I was considered to be equal to them? I reluctantly consented to participate in their council even as one of them [i.e. either Talḥah, or Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ], because of his opposition to me, turned against me, and voted

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[1] The whole narration of the council was summarised from: Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, pp. 185–188.

> in favour of my rival. The other one [i.e. Abd al-Raḥmān], due to his kinship with the caliph turned against me; and as for the other two [i.e. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr], it is better not to even mention their names, they voted according to the [anticipated] favours of the caliph.

This passage about the *shūrā* in the *Nahj al-Balāghah* suffices. Nonetheless it is necessary to analyse some specific aspects of the event.

The Council of 'Umar

In the following analysis (disregarding unimportant details) we would like to point out the following issues:

1. Different groups of people made suggestions to the second caliph about the procedure for succession to the caliphate. This shows that the people had quite naturally become conscious of the necessity to appoint a successor by the living caliph, so as to avoid the corruption and chaos that would otherwise afflict the lands of Islam.[1] Then, how is it possible for Sunni scholars to deny the factual truth of the appointment of a successor made by the Messenger of God during his lifetime?
2. The numerous proposals and suggestions with regard to nominating a successor made to the second caliph clearly indicate the lack of a plan for parliamentary government after the death of the Prophet – although such a government, in the absence of the divinely appointed rule of an imam or caliph, would be the most logical system to put in place. Currently, followers of such systems seek to prove that the foundation of Islamic government lies in a parliamentary structure. It is however to be noted that such parliamentary governments never existed throughout the history of Islam. Is it conceivable that all of the companions of the Prophet had ignored the Prophet's decree?
3. In response to public requests for statements, 'Umar said: 'If Abū 'Ubaydah was alive, I would choose him as my successor, as I had heard from the Messenger that he was the trustee (*amīn*) of the Muslim community (*ummah*). And if Sālim, the *mawlā* of Abī Ḥudhayfah, were alive, I would appoint him as my successor, as

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[1] See *Ghadīr* (Beirut edition), vol. 7, p. 133, quoting from *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (vol. 1, p. 22).

I had heard from the Prophet that he was a friend of God (*walī Allāh*).'

At that time, 'Umar was more concerned with the dead than the living: glorifying the dead, he was ignoring the living. Furthermore, if the trusteeship of the *ummah*, as well as friendship (*wilāyah*) with God were the decisive factors for selecting a successor to the caliphate, then why had 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib been forgotten? About him the Messenger said: "Alī is with the Truth (al-Ḥaqq) and the Truth is also with 'Alī."[1] [This is known as *ḥadīth al-ḥaqq*.] Although 'Umar was fully aware of 'Alī's status, his sublime virtues and character traits, his brilliant chivalry, his unsurpassable judgements, his penetrating intelligence, and his deep knowledge of the divine book, and the prophetic tradition, 'Umar only remembered the dead – those who cannot arouse the animosity or jealousy of anybody.

4. If the 'imamate' or 'caliphate' is a divine function and a prolongation of the role of the divinely appointed Messenger, it should be known and understood in the context of the 'explicit divine designation' (*naṣṣ ilāhī*) and revelation: and if it is a social function, it should correspondingly be understood in the context of human society and 'public opinion'. To choose an imam or caliph through a council appointed by the living caliph was neither in accordance with divine designation nor public opinion.
5. The fact that the council only consisted of six members is extremely ambiguous. If it was because of the Messenger's specific approval of them, why would his approval not also extend to 'Ammār, Ḥudhayfah al-Yamānī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Miqdād, Ubayy ibn Ka'b and many others? For example the Prophet once said: "Ammār is with the truth and the truth (the right path) turns with him wherever way he turns."[2] Regarding Abū Dharr, the Messenger said: 'The heavens have not shaded, nor has the earth borne any man more truthful than Abū Dharr.'[3] Ironically, the above personalities were excluded from the six-member council, but those included in the council were four members who had sour

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[1] This hadith has widely transmitted by Sunni traditionists; see *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition), vol. 3, pp. 156–159, and (vol. 3, pp. 176–180 in the Beirut edition).

[2] See *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition), vol. 9, p. 25.

[3] Historians unanimously acknowledged this hadith. It is documented in *Shakhṣiyyat-hā-yi Islāmī-yi Shī'ih*, p. 220.

relationships with 'Alī, as only Zubayr was in 'Alī's favour. However, the choice of Zubayr, after 'Uthmān's assassination, worked against 'Alī's right to the caliphate. Furthermore, if the criteria for the selection of members were based on participation in the battles of Badr and Uḥud, as well as being among the Migrants, then many others were qualified too; why were only those particular individuals selected?

6. The caliph claimed that his criterion for selecting the members of the council was based upon the approval of the Messenger at his deathbed, although some of his other sayings contradict this claim. Regarding Ṭalḥah, the caliph said: 'At the time of revelation of the verse of hijab, you uttered such words that the Messenger of God was angry with you until his death'. The caliph also criticised other members in a similar manner, rejecting their suitability for the caliphate as well for membership of the council. For example, the caliph had said to Zubayr: 'One day you are a human being and the next day a devil!' Could such a person be worthy of the caliphate and of council membership? If what he had said about Zubayr were really true, what would prevent the manifestation of the ill intentions of such a soul on the day of the council gathering? To 'Uthmān, the caliph said: 'Upon acceding to the caliphate you will mount the Umayyads and Banū Abī Mu'ayṭ on the backs of the people'; could 'Uthmān really be worthy of council membership or the caliphate?
7. How could the caliph have predicted 'Uthmān's succession to the caliphate? And how could he have foreseen the domination of 'Uthmān's tribe, as well as the revolt against him? (He had asked 'Uthmān to remember his sayings for the future.) Is this not proof of 'Umar's prior intention to select 'Uthmān as his successor?
8. Throughout his entire life, 'Umar had constantly been intent upon probing 'Alī's life and characteristics for any signs of weakness, but these efforts had been in vain. The only point, later emphasised by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, was 'Alī's sense of humour.[1] In fact, it was 'Alī's spiritual disregard for worldly affairs that was regarded as his 'sense of humour'. The most important criterion for leadership is sound decisions implemented with a forceful will to execute and

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[1] For 'Alī's reply to 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, see *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 82.

implement justice for the preservation of the people's rights; thus 'Alī was a leader par excellence, and this was explicitly acknowledged by 'Umar, when he said: 'If you rule over affairs, you shall lead the people towards the way of truth and light'.

9. Why did 'Umar entrust the power of veto, in equal votes to, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf? In this way he guaranteed the dominance of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who was also 'Uthmān's brother-in-law. Even if 'Abd al-Raḥmān was an objective judge with a good soul, this relationship could nevertheless have affected him unconsciously. No doubt, to solve the problem of equal votes, 'Umar could have appointed a third group of the Messenger's noble companions to make the final decision, but instead, he empowered 'Abd al-Raḥmān who, as mentioned above, was 'Uthmān's brother-in-law and a relative of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ.
10. While in pain, 'Umar addressed the audience and said: 'But if you maintain jealousy and bitterness towards each other, Mu'āwiyah will steal the caliphate!' Despite such proclamations, 'Umar nonetheless entrusted the power of veto to 'Abd al-Raḥmān, a close relative of 'Uthmān who was an Umayyad himself. Consequently, 'Uthmān's succession to the caliphate solidified Mu'āwiyah's later governorship. It is surprising that at times the caliph would confiscate the wealth of the dismissed governors, but Mu'āwiyah's position was never touched. Mu'āwiyah was free to gather wealth and strengthen his power in Greater Syria. The caliph was fully aware of Mu'āwiyah's apparatus which was practically modelled on that of the Byzantine emperor. It is, however, plausible that the hidden aim here was to solidify the position of the Umayyads, who were the staunch enemies of the Banū Hāshim in the pre-Islamic era. Therefore, it might be argued that there was an underlying aim to establish a threatening force outside Medina in order to be able to confront the likely rise of Banū Hāshim's authoritative power within Medina, the city which was still the centre of the Islamic empire.
11. In order to manifest his ostensible detachment, 'Umar discouraged others from electing his son as caliph, saying that he had been too shy even to divorce his wife. Yet 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar was qualified to be a prominent adviser. 'Umar said: 'In the case of equal votes

in the council, both sides must submit to the will of my son, 'Abd Allāh.' While at the same time, 'Umar never permitted Ḥasan ibn 'Alī and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās to be members of the council or even to be advisers; instead, they were permitted to attend as mere spectators.[1]

12. What would have happened if 'Umar or Abū Bakr had appointed 'Alī as their successor? The result could have been the prevention of many social maladies like the later plunder of the public treasury by the Umayyads – from Mu'āwiyah to Marwān – the weakening of people's fidelity to Islamic principles of governance, and the return to pre-Islamic pagan customs and codes. Indeed, the spiritual virtues, intellectual capabilities, and chivalric heroism of 'Alī could have been applied for the sake of the development of Muslim society, instead of being spent on overcoming hypocrisy and schism. If all of his efforts could have been expended on making manifest the exalted principles of Islam, then one could envisage a very different course of destiny for mankind, with many communities and nations coming into contact with the radiance of the Islamic ideal as embodied and enacted by the Imam.[2]
13. It is surprising that, on the one hand, 'Umar praised 'Abd al-Raḥmān as an outstanding believer, whose quality of 'faith' surpassed that of 'half of the pious people of the world', but, on the other hand, 'Umar called this famous rich man of the Quraysh the 'pharaoh of the community'.[3] As historical sources testify, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf was a very rich man who left behind a large amount of wealth. One can list a few items of his wealth: 1,000 cows, 3,000 sheep, 100 horses, and a vast area of cultivated land known as Jurf in the suburbs of Medina. Ibn 'Awf's four wives inherited 80,000 dinars each after his death;[4] in this light, could his quality of faith really surpass that of 'half of the pious people of the world'?
14. In order to choose 'Uthmān as caliph, 'Abd al-Raḥmān used a deceitful manipulation. First of all, 'Abd al-Raḥmān suggested to 'Alī to act upon the Book of God, the prophetic tradition, and the

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[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 112; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 24.

[2] Extract from *Mard-i Nā-Mutanāhī*, p. 144.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 24.

[4] *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition), vol. 8, p. 291 (p. 284 in the Lebanon edition).

conduct of the *shaykhayn* (i.e. the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar), even though he was fully aware that the third condition was of a totally different order from the first two, and would be regarded as unnecessary as well as disagreeable by 'Alī. Nonetheless he insisted, and 'Alī refused to accept the third condition. Then, secondly, 'Abd al-Raḥmān put forward the same proposal to his brother-in-law, 'Uthmān, who immediately accepted.

15. For 'Alī, the caliphate was not the goal of his ambitions, but a necessity to prevent wrong, but the same cannot be said of his rival, 'Uthmān. Had 'Alī desired the caliphate as much as 'Uthmān, accepting Ibn 'Awf's proposal would have been the easier option. But 'Alī would never countenance attaining the true by means of the false.

16. From the outset, 'Alī was fully aware of the second caliph's perspective and the intentions of the candidates. Therefore, just after the formation of the 'council', 'Alī said to his uncle 'Abbās: 'This time too, we are deprived of the caliphate.' 'Alī was not the only one to predict the council's decision; upon hearing of the men who were in the council, a young man like 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās declared: "Umar wants 'Uthmān to become caliph'.[1]

17. 'Umar ordered Muḥammad ibn Maslamah that, in the event of the majority being opposed by a minority, the minority should be executed; and if the parties were in equal opposition, the side opposed to 'Abd al-Raḥmān was to be executed forthwith. Finally, 'Umar said to Muḥammad ibn Maslamah: 'If within three days no agreement be forthcoming, then the sword should be applied to all of the parties'. One might say, ironically, congratulations on this 'freedom of expression', for where on earth could the execution of those holding a minority opinion be acceptable? For a full decade, the Islamic community had endured the rule of this hard-hearted person, who was neither sound in his administration, nor endowed with compassionate sentiment, such that it was said, 'The people feared the whip of 'Umar more than the sword of Ḥajjāj'.

The caliphate of 'Uthmān consolidated the Umayyad clan to such an extent that Abū Sufyān, who was a member of 'Uthmān's clan, one day approached Uḥud and the tomb of Ḥamzah, the Prophet’s uncle and a great commander of the Muslim army who had killed a large number of Abū Sufyān’s companions in battle, and, while trampling on his grave, uttered these words: ‘O Abū Ya‘lā, arise and look: what we fought for, we have now acquired.’[1] In the early days of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, at a family gathering in his house, this impious old man (i.e. Abū Sufyān) addressed all those present, saying: ‘Hold the caliphate turn by turn, employ executive agents from the Umayyads; there is no purpose other than to rule. There is neither hell nor paradise!’ [2]

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[1] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 45; also Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 93.

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[1] *Naqsh-i Wu‘‘āẓ dar Islām*, p. 151.

[2] *Istī‘āb*, vol. 2, p. 290.

8

ʿAlī's View on the Prophet's Household

The twenty-five year period that intervened between the death of the Prophet and the commencement of ʿAlī's caliphate was a sensitive one, during which much knowledge was consolidated and disseminated by the Imam. Some of the enlightening principles taught by him have been mentioned in previous chapters, but a few more will be elucidated here:

1. his conduct towards the first three caliphs;
2. his teaching of Islamic doctrines and legal precepts to Muslims;
3. principles governing the social domain.

Before analysing ʿAlī's position in relation to his three predecessors in the caliphate, it is necessary to assess his views on the Prophet's family (*āl*). ʿAlī's contribution to the rule of the caliphate with regard to political, religious, and jurisprudential issues was determined by his aspiration to spread and deepen the religion of Islam. ʿAlī was fully aware of the unassailable status of the Prophet's family as the real centre of Muslim society; he said: 'No one in the *ummah* can be compared to the Prophet's household, nor can anyone be deemed to have been granted equal graces'.[1] In another utterance regarding the virtues of the Prophet's family, ʿAlī said: 'The members of the Prophet's family hold the keys to the prophetic mysteries; they are the true followers of the Prophet; the bearers of his wisdom, the guardians of his knowledge, and the upholders of his scriptures. They are the mountains protecting the land of Islam against the damage of earthquakes. Leaning upon them, the Prophet stood up...'[1] In another statement, 'Alī refers to the family of the Prophet as the 'foundation of Islam and the pillar of certainty through whom those who have gone astray may return to the right path of truth.'[2] He also declared: 'Follow the path of the Prophet's household, a path which will never lead you astray. If they halt in a place, you should also halt; if they rise to go forward, then you should rise to go forward after them. Never go in front of them or else you shall lose your way; nor lag behind them or else you shall be destroyed.'[3]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 2.

For 'Alī, knowledge of God and the Messenger went side by side with knowledge of his household: 'Anyone of you who dies in his bed, while attaining true knowledge of his Lord and His messenger, as well as the Messenger's household, shall be regarded as a martyr.'[4] This most definitive saying sheds light on the true significance of the following prophetic hadith: 'He who dies without recognising the Imam of his age is like one who had died during the *jāhiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance)'. In another saying, the Imam refers to continuation of the link in the chain of divine guidance between man and God [through belief in the imamate as originating from the Prophet's household]: 'The members of the Prophet's family are like the stars turning in the sky, if one falls, another rises'.[5]

There are numerous sayings attributed to 'Alī about the Prophet's household, a few of which will be mentioned.[6] 'May my parents be sacrificed for those whose names are well known in the heavens yet unknown in the earth.'[7] Also, 'They have intellectually grasped the principles and practices of the faith, realising them actively and directly, not passively (through hearing it) or indirectly (receiving it as transmitted from others); the transmitters of knowledge are numerous, but the possessors thereof are few.'[8]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 93.

[4] Ibid., Sermon 185.

[5] Ibid., Sermon 96.

[6] See also, *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Fayḍ), sermons 93, 96, 108, 119, 147, 153, 160, 224; also, Letter 17.

[7] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 182.

[8] Ibid., Sermon 234.

In another utterance, 'Alī clearly designated them as the heirs and successors of the Prophet, thus, the true leaders and *walīs* (saints and guardians) of the *ummah*: 'They possess all the characteristic qualities of vicegerency (*wilāyah*) and imamate (*imāmah*); the Prophet's will was addressed to them, thus, they are the (true) heirs of the prophets.'[1]

Having established 'Alī's view on the pre-eminent status of the Prophet's household, it is appropriate to analyse the conduct of 'Alī, as the head of such a distinguished household, in relation to the first three caliphs, and to do so on the basis of authenticated historical sources.

'Alī: The Unique Intellectual and Juristic Authority to the Caliphs

Despite twenty-five years of silence during the period of the first three caliphs, the Imam was not in a state of absolute seclusion. Although he had been deprived of political power, he remained the most authoritative, and thus the most respected, figure in the various fields of learning and knowledge, including the whole jurisprudential sphere. During this period of silence, he actually instituted the judiciary system of the Islamic state. Whenever problems or insoluble disputes arose, they would immediately be referred to him for judgement. On a number of occasions, 'Alī personally intervened in a dispute, even without being asked, and prevented the caliphs, the official authorities in terms of the law, from issuing erroneous judgements. Repeatedly, the Imam would arrive at prudent solutions and wise judgements that would deeply impress the Prophet's companions.

Even though 'Alī could not endorse the rule of the first three caliphs – seeing himself as being the most appropriate person to rule the community, having been designated explicitly for this office by the Prophet – nonetheless, whenever there was an issue pertaining to the welfare of Islam and the Muslims, he ceaselessly and wholeheartedly offered up his services to the caliphs, doing so to the point of self-sacrifice. His spiritual station as well as his magnanimity was such that he would never react to his situation in a petty manner, and think that, because he had been deprived of his right to rule, he should abstain from all outward activity, offer no help to the caliphs, make no interventions in public affairs, and thereby let the chaos and dissension reach the point that the caliphate itself would be undermined and collapse. Such an attitude hardly befitted such a noble soul, one who had been nurtured by the very soil of Islam, and had devotedly participated in the spread of Islam; always being profoundly impressed by concern for the newly established religion, 'Alī could not seal his lips with silence and lock his door to the outside world.

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 2.

One of the pre-requisites for the consolidation and expansion of Islam was to impart to the newly established community a knowledge of the essential principles of doctrine and action proper to the faith; one aspect of this consolidation was the preservation of the dignity of Islam in the face of the numerous Jewish and Christian scholars who came to Medina to investigate this new religion. The Imam took up this challenge, seeing it as being of fundamental importance, and entered into these debates to the extent that he was able, and in the measure that the caliphal apparatus did not prevent him from doing so; indeed, the caliphs often sought his guidance in this area.

In a letter sent to the people of Egypt through Mālik al-Ashtar, 'Alī clearly explained the underlying rationale of his collaboration with the caliphs:

> At first I ceased to contribute and left them to themselves until I noticed that a group of people had turned their backs to Islam, inviting others to undermine Muḥammad's religion. I feared that if I do not rise to assist the Muslims I would witness the destruction of the magnificent edifice of Islam. This calamity, for me, was far greater than a few days of governorship, which would vanish like a mirage.[1]

This letter clearly expresses 'Alī's spiritual attitude on this issue and the logic underlying his participation in the affairs of a state which was governed by a group whose legitimacy the Imam did not recognise.

The Prophet's Confirmation of 'Alī's Succession

The first three caliphs and the companions of the Prophet sought 'Alī's advice after the Prophet's death, because they had heard his clear approval of 'Alī's knowledge in various fields, including knowledge, comprehension, and wisdom of judgement. One of these sayings is, 'Among my *ummah*, the person who is most learned as regards the tradition

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 62.

(*sunnah*) and legal judgement (*qaḍā'*) is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.'[1] Although the Messenger also approved of the authoritative knowledge of a number of other companions – including Zayd ibn Thābit and Ubayy ibn Ka'b – he regarded 'Alī as the most excellent among all of his companions. 'The most knowledgeable of you as regards legal judgement is 'Alī.'[2] Another saying of the Prophet still echoed in their ears: 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate, thus, whosoever desires knowledge should come to its gate'.[3]

How, then, could the caliphal apparatus, and the companions of the Prophet generally, not have recourse to the Imam and his opinion whenever they were faced with a difficult issue? They had witnessed with their own eyes another incident confirming 'Alī's authoritative knowledge: when the inhabitants of Yemen requested the Messenger to send them 'a distinguished man capable of explaining the teachings and traditions of the religion of Islam, and one who can dispense justice according to the legal principles enshrined in the Book of God', the Messenger turned to 'Alī and said: 'O 'Alī, proceed towards Yemen and teach them the religion and its traditions and precepts, and judge among them according to the Book of God.' Then the Prophet put his hand on 'Alī's breast and continued: 'Go, and God shall guide your heart towards the Truth, and protect your tongue against all mistakes and errors.'[4] The Prophet's supplication was accepted by God, for 'Alī afterwards said: 'From that moment until now, I have never had any doubt or hesitation when confronted by any difficulty.'

'Alī's Legal Judgements during the Prophet's Lifetime

'Alī appeared as an authoritative judge both during the period of the first three caliphs and also during the lifetime of the Prophet. 'Alī's judgements, as delivered in Yemen and Medina, were highly praised by the Messenger of God. In fact, the Prophet tried to present and confirm 'Alī as the judge *par excellence* of the Islamic community. It is appropriate to cite here two cases which took place during the Prophet's lifetime.

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[1] *Kifāyat al-Ṭālib* (Najaf edition), p. 190.

[2] Ibid., p. 104.

[3] Mīr Ḥāmid Ḥusayn al-Hindī has devoted one of the volumes of his *'Abaqāt al-Anwār* to the study of the transmission chain of this prophetic hadith.

[4] *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 6, p. 392.

1. While 'Alī was residing in Yemen at the order of the Prophet, the following event occurred: a group of hunters encircled a lion in a deep ditch. Suddenly the foot of one of the men slipped; to save himself he held the hand of another man who in turn held the hand of the third, and the third grabbed the hand of the fourth, so finally all fell in the ditch, and suffered injuries from the lion, resulting in their death. Quarrels started among the deceased relatives. It came to 'Alī's notice and he announced: 'I shall arbitrate among you and if it is unacceptable, take your dispute to the Messenger and he will judge among you.' 'Alī continued: 'Those who dug the ditch must pay the compensation accordingly; to the first man's relatives one fourth of the blood money; to the second man's relatives, one third of that; to the third man's relatives half of that; and to the fourth one's relatives full blood money'. When 'Alī was asked the reason for the blood money of the first man to be one fourth, he replied: 'Because after him three more were killed, and the second is to be paid one third because two more were killed, and for the third man half the blood money because another man was killed after him, and for the fourth, therefore, full compensation must be paid, because he was the last to be killed.'[1] The relatives of the deceased however disapproved of 'Alī's judgement and travelled to Medina and explained the event to the Messenger; he said: "Alī's judgement is sound'.[2] A number of Sunni and Shi'a traditionists have narrated 'Alī's judgement as above, while there are another group of Shi'a traditionists who have transmitted it as follows: 'There is no blood money for the first man, but the first man's relatives must pay one third to the second man's relatives, and the second man's relatives must pay half the blood money to the third man's relatives, and the third man's relatives must pay the full amount to the fourth man's family.' According to the majority of Shi'a scholars some traditionists in the transmission chain of the first version are not reliable, however, they confirm the authenticity of the sources of the second version. One should take careful note of the subtle wisdom expressed in this version of the judgement, for the Imam distributed the fourth man's blood money equally among the other three men's relatives: the relatives of the first man must pay one

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[1] *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 84; *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 2, p. 393; *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 19, p. 175.

[2] *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 2, p. 393; *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 19, p. 175.

third of the blood-compensation to the second man's relatives; the second man's relatives must pay two thirds of the blood money to the third man's relatives – in fact, one third of the full amount, to be added to the compensation that they receive from the relatives of the first man – and the third man's family must pay the full blood money – in fact one third of the full amount to be added to the compensation that they receive from the second man's family – thus the fourth's man's blood money is shared between the first three men.[1]

2. The Messenger and a group of Muslims had gathered in the Prophet's mosque, when two quarelling men entered, and asked the following question: 'If an ox kills someone else's animal with its horns, should the owner of the ox pay the blood money?' One of the Muslims proffered his opinion: that there is no responsibility of the owner when it comes to the acts of his domestic animals. According to al-Kulaynī, the Prophet summoned Abū Bakr and 'Umar to arbitrate in this dispute. Both affirmed that when an animal kills another animal there is no blood money to be paid.[2] The Messenger turned to 'Alī for his judgement. 'Alī laid a general ruling, which is still applied and upheld in Islamic law: 'The guilty one must pay for the damage incurred; so if it was the case that the ox owner had failed to look after the ox responsibly, such that the beast was running loose, then the owner of the ox is guilty and must pay the penalty. However, if the cause of the death was that the owner of the cow had allowed his animal to stray, then the responsibility falls upon him, and he is owed no blood money.'

After hearing 'Alī's judgement, the Messenger raised his hands up to the sky and declared: 'Praise be to God who has granted to my community those who judge according to the judgements of the prophets.'[3] Needless to say, 'Alī's wise judgements were not limited to these cases. There were numerous incidents which took place during the Messenger's lifetime, and these are all recorded in the primary sources.[4]

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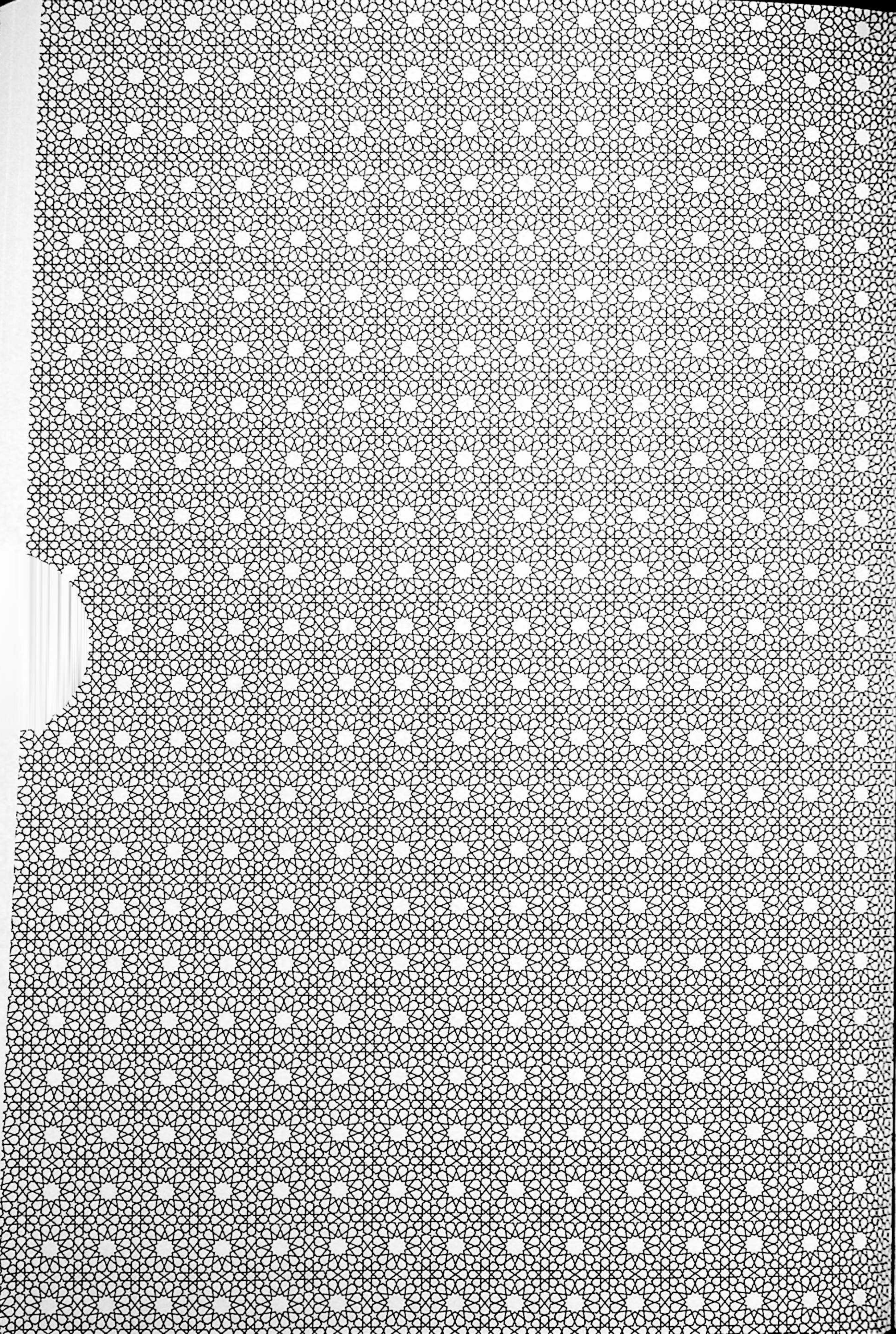
[1] See *Jawāhir al-Kalām*, vol. 6, section on *diyāt*, discussion of *tazāḥum al-mawjibāt.*

[2] *Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 352, hadiths 6, 7.

[3] *Ṣawā'iq al-Muḥriqah*, p. 75; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 448.

[4] Majlisī has devoted an entire section to these rulings; see his *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol 4, pp. 219–240.



9

ʿAlī and the Political Difficulties of the First Caliph

The Prophet's constant confirmation of ʿAlī, in the presence of the companions, established him as the most important intellectual authority in Muslim society after the death of the Prophet. Even those who had unexpectedly removed ʿAlī from the political arena and excluded him from the caliphate joined hands with others to seek his guidance on complex intellectual, religious, and even political issues.

This fact is attested throughout the most reliable sources on the history of Islam, and cannot be denied by any impartial observer. This alone demonstrates that ʿAlī was the most knowledgeable person in the community in respect of the Book of God, the prophetic tradition (*sunnah*), and the principles and applications of religious rulings, as well as being the one most cognizant of political and social welfare for the community as a whole. Yet the author of *Washīʿah*, emphasising the superiority of the second caliph, denies this historical fact which is attested by dozens of other sources; and claims that ʿUmar was the greatest of the companions as regards religious knowledge and legal rulings.[1] However, other historical sources frequently refer to cases where the first three caliphs sought guidance from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Below, a few of these cases are cited.

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[1] See *al-Washīʿah*, 'Introduction'.

Battle against the Byzantines

Being a steadfast enemy, the Byzantine Empire was a constant threat to the northern frontiers of the Islamic state. The Messenger was fully aware of this danger until the last hour of his life. Thus he dispatched an army commanded by Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib to march towards the boundary regions of Syria in 7 AH / 628 CE, but the army lost three chief commanders and returned to Medina without any definite resolution of the problem. To compensate for such a defeat, in 9 AH / 630 CE the Prophet, along with an equipped army, marched towards Tabūk but returned to Medina without any confrontation. However, as suggested by many sources, this military expedition did result in fruitful political achievements. Nevertheless, the threat of the Byzantine Empire constantly occupied the Messenger, to such an extent that even on his deathbed, he organised an army consisting of the Migrants and the Helpers to march towards the boundary regions of Syria. But, when the Prophet passed away, the army was put to a halt a few miles from Medina due to various reasons. After the Prophet's death, and the assumption of the caliphate by Abū Bakr, the political ambience of Medina began to decline. Abū Bakr was unable to decide what to do about the Byzantines. He consulted a number of senior companions about this issue but was dissatisfied until he asked 'Alī's advice, who encouraged him to fulfil the Prophet's order and replied: 'If you fight with the Byzantines, you shall be victorious'. The caliph was pleased and said: 'You have granted us a good omen with these glad tidings!'[1]

Discussion between 'Alī and Renowned Rabbis

After the death of the Prophet, a group of Jewish and Christian scholars came to Medina to question Muslims over religious matters, in order to humiliate them and undermine their morale. For example, a group of Jewish rabbis put forward a number of questions including the following: 'In the Torah, we read that the Messenger's successors are the most learned among his *ummah*. Now you (Abū Bakr) are the successor of your prophet, so tell us: where is God – on earth or in the heavens?' Abū Bakr's reply was not convincing; he said that the Almighty is on the Throne of Glory (*'arsh*). The Jewish scholars refuted the caliph: 'If this be true, then the earth is devoid of Him'! At this sensitive juncture, 'Alī came to the rescue of Islam and upheld the dignity of the Muslim community.

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[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Najaf edition), vol. 2, p. 123.

With impeccable reasoning he asserted: 'Indeed, God is the Creator of "where-ness", thus nowhere can be ascribed to Him. He transcends all place, and yet is present everywhere, without being encompassed or touched by any entity. His Knowledge is All-Embracing, and no thing is situated outside the domain of His omnipotent ordinance.'[1]

'Alī's reasoning and perspicacity, demonstrating the impossibility of locating God in any physical space, astonished the rabbis and they could not help admiring his knowledge; they also recognised that he was indeed the most rightful person to succeed the Prophet.

By referring to God as the Creator of all 'where-ness', all conceivable space and places therein, 'Alī was affirming one of the proofs of *tawḥīd*: God is regarded as the one and only, eternal by essence (*al-qadīm bi al-dhāt*), and every entity as well as every category or quality (such as time and space), are creations of God – thus God cannot be 'contained' within any category of His own creation. If God is located in a certain place, such a place would have to be eternal by its very essence, as is God Himself – but such an hypothesis runs counter to the truth of *tawḥīd* that establishes that nothing can be placed alongside Him or His exclusive eternity. In other words, if one were to posit a place for God, this place must either be eternal like Him or else created by Him. The first supposition contradicts the principle of *tawḥīd* according to which nothing in existence partakes of eternity; and the second supposition, that the place of God is one of His creations, itself asserts that God has no need of any place, for it implies that God existed, when there was no 'place', and then created a place in which to exist: if He 'was' before creating a place, He evidently had no need of any place in the first place!

In the second part of his reply – that God is present everywhere without being touched or determined by any entity – he was implicitly affirming one of the divine attributes, that is, infinitude; now one of the concomitants of divine infinitude is omnipresence – being everywhere – and thus encompassing all of existence in pure consciousness; and since God is not a material substance, there can be no empirical or physical contact between Him and any of the objects of His creation, nor can He be seen as contiguous with any created thing.

It will readily be seen that in these concise utterances of 'Alī there lies a wealth of inspired knowledge of the ultimate realities. These and many other answers given by the Imam to such questions – both during the caliphate of all three of his successors, and indeed during that of his own – bear eloquent testimony to the depth and penetration of his insight. Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī has also narrated discussions between ʿAlī and forty rabbis which calls for an independent, comprehensive analysis.[1] It is worth mentioning here that the method of discourse employed by the Imam was determined by the level of knowledge of his interlocutor. At times, he would base his statements on the most explicit and precise rational principles, while at other times he would resort to the use of creative images and metaphors to illustrate those principles.

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[1] Al-Mufīd, *Irshād* (lithograph edition), p. 107.

Convincing Reply to a Christian Scholar

According to Salmān al-Fārsī,

> After the Messenger's death, a group of Christians led by a bishop entered Medina. In the presence of the caliph, they put forward a number of questions; in return the caliph sent them to ʿAlī. One of the questions was, again, about the location of God: 'Where is He?'
>
> ʿAlī kindled a fire, and then asked: 'In which direction is the fire facing?'
>
> The Christian scholar replied: 'Every direction, the fire has no back or front, therefore, it is facing everywhere.'
>
> To which ʿAlī retorted: 'If fire, which is an entity created by God, has no exclusive front or back, then surely its Creator – who infinitely transcends His own creations such that there is no similarity between Him and them – can have no front and back; the East and the West are His creations, so that wherever you turn you see His exalted countenance. Nothing is hidden from Him.'[2]

ʿAlī not only assisted the caliphs on such questions of faith and intellect, he also came to their help when they found themselves stumped over particular terms and concepts in the Qur'an. For example, Abū Bakr was once asked about the meaning of the word *abb* in the Qur'anic verse: '*fruits and pastures* (abb), *as sustenance for you and your livestock*' (80:31–32). The first caliph replied, in a state of bewilderment: 'What would come of me if I were to interpret the words of God without sufficient knowledge?'

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[1] See *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 1, p. 72.

[2] *Qaḍā' Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Najaf edition, 1369 AH / 1950 CE), p. 96.

When the news of this event reached the Imam, he said: '*Abb* refers to grass and vegetation'.[1] The context in which this word occurs itself clearly reveals that the meaning of this word is indeed grass or fodder, because in the verse mentioned, *abb* follows *fākihah* ('fruit'), and the two are described as being 'nourishment for you [i.e. human beings] and your cattle (*anʿāmikum*)'. Just as human beings are nourished on fruit, so cattle are nourished on fodder.

The Imam's Ruling on a Drinker

The first caliph did not resort to ʿAlī only in respect of such issues as Qur'anic terms and theological principles; he also sought the assistance of the Imam in the domain of interpretation and the application of legal rulings. For example, a man who was guilty of drinking wine was brought before the caliph in order to receive the appropriate punishment. However, the man claimed that he was not aware of the Islamic prohibition against wine, as he was living among people who believed that wine was still permitted, and had not been told about the prohibition. The caliph was unable to judge the matter, and so he immediately sent someone to ʿAlī for his advice. ʿAlī said: 'Two trustworthy men must take the man to the regular teaching sessions of the Migrants and the Helpers and ask them whether they had recited, in front of this man, the Qur'anic verse regarding the prohibition against wine; if their replies are positive, the punishment must be carried out; if not, the man must repent, declare solemnly that he will never drink wine again, and then be released.' The caliph followed ʿAlī's advice and, after carrying out the due investigations, the man was released.[2]

Thus it can be seen that although the Imam did indeed withdraw from active involvement in the caliphal state apparatus, he always maintained a sense of responsibility for the Islamic community, and never neglected to come to its defence whenever crucial matters pertaining to the defence of the faith, articulation of doctrine, or interpretation of law, were at stake.

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[1] *Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 6, p. 317; al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, p. 106.

[2] *Kāfī*, vol. 2, hadith 16; al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, p. 106; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 489.

As stated by certain historical sources, Ra's al-Jālūt, a renowned Jewish figure, asked Abū Bakr about the Qur'anic perspective on the following matters:

1. what is the origin of life?
2. which inanimate creatures are capable of a form of speech?
3. what is it that is constantly in a state of increase and decrease?

When 'Alī heard about these questions he said: 'According to the Qur'an, the origin of life is water.[1] Those inanimate creatures capable of speech are the heaven and earth, when declaring their submission to God's command.[2] And that which is in a state of constant increase and diminution is day and night.'[3]

As will have been noted, the Imam substantiated his statements by reference, implicitly or explicitly, to Qur'anic verses, which added great force to the impeccable reasoning which he always employed in the formulation of his arguments, and his responses to such questions.[4]

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[1] See Qur'an 21:30, '*And We made every living thing out of water.*'

[2] See Qur'an 41:11, '*And He said to it and to the earth, "Come! Willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come heartily".*'

[3] See Qur'an 31:29, '*Have you not regarded that God makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night.*'

[4] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 40, p. 224.

10

The Political Advisor to the Second Caliph

The Imam's principal goal was to protect the interests of Muslims and to facilitate the consolidation and expansion of the religion of Islam. Despite his awareness of being the designated heir (*waṣī*) of the Prophet, and of being the most eminently qualified person for undertaking the responsibility of the caliphate, he was nonetheless always ready to apply his penetrating insight and lofty comprehension to the resolution of whatever difficulty might arise for the caliphate. During the rule of 'Umar, 'Alī thus resolved numerous political, social, doctrinal and legal problems by which the second caliph was confronted; a few of which are mentioned below.

The Conquest of Persia

In the year 14 AH / 635 CE, during the fierce Battle of Qādisiyyah between the Muslims and the Persians, Rustam Farrukhzād, the chief commander of the Persian army, was killed, as were a number of his commanders. The entire region of Iraq and Madā'in – the capital of the Sāsānid king – were conquered by the Muslim forces, compelling the remaining Persian commanders and their troops to retreat into the central parts of what remained of the empire.

The Persians were concerned that the Muslims would gradually take over the entire empire. In order to counter this very real possibility, King Yazdgird III prepared an army consisting of one hundred and fifty thousand men under the command of Fīrūzān. The intention behind this amassing of forces was to prevent the forthcoming attacks of the

Arabians, while waiting for the most opportune moment to mount a counter-offensive.

The commander in chief of the Islamic forces was Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, the governor of Kufa (according to some sources, the commander was ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir). Saʿd sent a letter to ʿUmar, informing him about the situation, and telling him that the forces of Kufa were prepared to initiate the impending conflict with the Persians, rather than simply wait for the Persians to launch their attack; this strategy, he said, would strike terror into the hearts of the Persians, showing them that the Muslims were not in the least fearful of the Persian forces. The caliph went to the mosque of Medina, summoning the elder companions so as to inform them about his decision to leave Medina, and to go to a place between Basra and Kufa, in order to lead the Muslim forces in person. After hearing what ʿUmar had decided, Ṭalḥah encouraged the caliph in a speech which smacked of flattery. The next set of encouraging words came from ʿUthmān, who not only agreed that ʿUmar should leave Medina, he also suggested that all the troops in Syria and Yemen should leave those regions and join the caliph, in order to create a massive army to fight against Persia.

At this point ʿAlī intervened. He opposed both ideas: 'Recently conquered territories like Syria and Yemen should not be left without troops. If you reposition those troops elsewhere, the Abyssinian army will take control of Yemen and the Roman forces will capture Syria, thus enslaving the women and children of the Muslims in these two regions. If you leave Medina, the Arabian rebels may take advantage of the situation, attack the capital and create a disturbance (*fitnah*) whose negative consequences are much worse than those which you are going to try and avoid in Persia. The function of a ruler is similar to the string of beads which keeps them all together; if it is torn, the beads will scatter.

'If you are worried about the numbers of the Muslims, remember that the magnitude of their faith will multiply their force. Be like the axis around which the mill rotates when mobilising the Muslim troops.[1] Furthermore, if you participate in the battle, it would be a source of encouragement for the Persians, and they would try to kill you, seeing you as the pivot of the Muslim empire, and thinking that apart from you there is no other leader of the Muslims, so that by killing you they are resolving all their problems at a stroke. Thus, their motivation will be deepened and their determination to achieve victory would be doubled.'

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[1] That is, be constant and stable while everying is moving around you.

After hearing the Imam's counsel, the caliph said: 'The opinion of 'Alī, that is the opinion which is correct, and I am happy to follow his advice.'[1]

Counsel at the Conquest of Jerusalem

'Umar once again consulted the Imam with regard to the conquest of Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis), and followed his advice. One month had elapsed since Syria had been conquered, and the Muslims forces were intending to march on Jerusalem. The commanders in charge were Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ and Mu'ādh ibn Jabal. Mu'ādh asked Abū 'Ubaydah to write a letter to the caliph about the issue of Jerusalem. 'Umar read the letter out to the senior companions and asked for their opinions. The Imam encouraged the caliph to instruct his commanders to advance towards Jerusalem, and he even advised that, following the conquest of Jerusalem, the Muslims should advance even further into the territories of the Byzantine Empire. He told 'Umar that he should be assured of victory, as the Prophet had predicted this triumph for the Muslims. The caliph instantly called for paper and pen, and composed a letter commanding Abū 'Ubaydah to advance towards Jerusalem. He added that: 'The Prophet's cousin has given us the glad tidings that Jerusalem will be conquered through you.'[2]

Establishing the Islamic Calendar

Each nation and people has its own era, that is, its own manner of registering key events in terms of some foundational date. The birth of Jesus Christ marks the commencement of the Christian era. The Year of the Elephant, *'ām al-fīl*, marks the commencement of history for the pre-Islamic Arabs. Thus every nation or religion has its own chronological system, usually based on significant events. However, the Muslims did not have such a point of reference until the third year of 'Umar's caliphate. Thus the dates of official correspondence bore only the month in which the document was written and made no mention of any year. This brought about a number of problems. Often two contrary orders were issued for a military commander or a city governor; the officer in charge was unable to differentiate between them as distances were far apart and the letters had no dates. He would be unable to determine which of the two orders came first, and which second.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 144; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, pp. 237–238; Kāmil, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 3; Ibn Kathīr, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 7, p. 107; *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Kumpānī's edition), vol. 9, p. 501.

[2] Taqī al-Dīn Ḥamawī, *Thamarat al-Awrāq* (Cairo, 1368/1949), vol. 2, p. 15.

Accordingly, the caliph, assembled all of the companions, and asked for their opinion on the question of which year should mark the official inauguration of the Islamic era. Some suggested the year of the Prophet's birth, others insisted on the year in which his prophetic mission (*biʿthah*) began. But the Imam advised that the date of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina – his departure from the land occupied by idolaters, to the land of the believers – should be the starting point of the Islamic era. Among all the proposals, ʿUmar accepted ʿAlī's.[1] So, from that moment to the present day, all official correspondence was dated in accordance with the Hijra year.

It is of course true that the Prophet's birth as well as the onset of his prophetic mission were events of great importance in the formative period of Islam. But at the time the Prophet was born, nothing was known of the religion of Islam; and at the time his prophetic mission began, the religion had not achieved its institutional structure. The *hijrah*, on the contrary, marks the true beginning of the formal organisation of the Islamic religion, its victory over the forces of idolatry, and the founding of the Islamic state. It marked the abandonment, once and for all, of the lands occupied by the idolaters, and the establishment of a homeland for the Muslims.

Legal Authority for Issuing Fatwas during the Rule of ʿUmar

After the Prophet's passing away, the expansion of Islam among different nations caused a chain of unexpected events to arise, about which there were no explicit references in the Qur'an and prophetic hadiths. The number of Qur'anic verses and prophetic hadiths relating to legal rulings (*aḥkām*, sing. *ḥukm*) and their application to particular cases (*furūʿ*) did not exceed four hundred.[1] In regard to the many issues that could not be resolved by recourse to a clear proof-text in the primary sources, a group of learned companions came together in an effort to resolve the problem by means of their own reasonings and personal understanding, which was not always sound. This group, known as *aṣḥāb al-ra'y* ('the folk of opinion'), instead of referring to the definite and indubitable dictates from the sources of the law – the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition – issued certain legal decrees (*fatāwā*) based on their own personal opinions, and upon guesses of what the divine decree might be in the cases brought before them.

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[1] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 1, p. 123; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 253; *Kanz al-ʿUmmāl*, vol. 5, p. 244; Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (Egypt edition), vol. 3, p. 113.

The second caliph made certain accusations against the methods of the *aṣḥāb al-ra'y*, even though he acted upon his own opinions in certain cases, in contrast to divine decrees, as historical sources have shown. He was quoted as saying: 'The *aṣḥāb al-ra'y* are enemies of the prophetic tradition; being unable to learn the prophetic hadiths by heart, they went astray and led astray by issuing decrees on the basis of their own opinions. Beware: we should preserve and follow the orthodoxy of the prophetic tradition, and not innovate or resort to unorthodox personal opinions. We should attach ourselves to the prophetic hadiths to be saved and guided.'

Although in some cases the caliph issued decrees on the basis of his personal reasoning, either, as we have seen, in opposition to clear prophetic dictates, or else when there were no clear sayings or texts to apply, nonetheless, in many other cases, he did indeed knock at the 'gate of prophetic knowledge', that is, he resorted to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to ask him to resolve the difficulties. According to an explicit declaration of the Prophet, 'Alī was the treasury of prophetic knowledge and sciences, and the inheritor of the divine laws – a treasury that will be available and called upon until the Day of Judgement. There was no one more knowledgeable than him. History has recorded dozens of cases that the second caliph referred to 'Alī, in order to resolve matters. 'Umar was so impressed by 'Alī's divine wisdom that he used to utter such sayings as 'Nowadays, women are incapable of giving birth to one who could even resemble 'Alī' and 'O God do not confront me with a problem without it being vouchsafed by the wisdom of the son of Abī Ṭālib'. Some of these cases can profitably be mentioned here.

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[1] Rāshid Riḍā, *Waḥy al-Muḥammadī* (2nd ed.), p.225; in this valuable work, the author shows that after the Prophet's death, only about 400 prophetic hadiths on legal rulings (*aḥkām*) and their applications in certain cases (*furū'*) were left to the companions. The likelihood that there were once more than this number, and that subsequently they were lost, is very small.

1. A man's wife delivered a child just after six months of marriage, and the man complained to 'Umar. His wife also accepted the fact that she had given birth to the child only six months after her marriage, but she insisted that she had not had intercourse before her marriage. 'Umar ordered that she be punished, and decreed that she be stoned to death. But the Imam intervened. 'From the Qur'anic point of view the duration of pregnancy is between six and nine months, because Allah says: "*and his gestation and weaning take thirty months*" (46:15); and according to another verse: "*and his weaning takes two years*" (31:14). If two years (twenty-four months) are deducted from thirty months, then six months are left as a possible duration of a woman's pregnancy.' After hearing 'Alī's impeccable logic, the caliph 'Umar famously declared: 'Were it not for 'Alī, 'Umar would indeed have been destroyed!'[1]
2. The second caliph was supposed to judge five persons accused of illicit sexual intercourse. The caliph ordered equal punishments for them. Again, 'Alī challenged 'Umar's judgement, declaring that each person's case must be individually investigated. If each one's state is different, then the recompense for each, according to divine law, must likewise be different. Upon investigation, 'Alī said: 'The first one must be beheaded, the second one must be punished by stoning, the third one must be punished by one hundred lashes, the fourth one must be punished by fifty lashes, and the fifth one must simply be subject to a rebuke.' The caliph was astonished and inquired about the reasoning behind this differentiated judgement.

'Alī said: 'The first man is a *dhimmī* ('protected') non-Muslim (a free disbeliever subject living in Muslim society). His life is protected for as long as he abides by the laws and rulings of society proper to his status; but as soon as he tramples underfoot these laws, he loses his status as protected, and must be executed. As for the second man, he committed adultery with a married woman, thus he should be punished by stoning. The third one is a young, single man, who has rendered himself impure – thus he must be punished with one hundred lashes. The fourth man is a slave, thus his punishment is half that of a free man. The fifth man is afflicted with a mental disorder, and should simply be warned.'[1] At this point the caliph uttered the following words: 'I prefer not to be in a session wherein you are not present.'

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[1] Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 496; *Biḥār*, vol. 40, p. 332.

3. A slave was dragging in chains and fetters. There were two persons disagreeing as to his weight and each of the two said that if he were wrong he would irrevocably divorce his wife! They went to the owner of the slave and asked him to remove the chains to weigh the slave. He said, 'I do not know his weight, but I have made a vow that I would never remove his chains unless I pay alms to the needy as much as his weight.'

The caliph was asked to declare his opinion. He said, 'Now that the owner of the slave has a justifiable excuse for not removing the chains, both men need to divorce their wives.' They asked the caliph to ask 'Alī's opinion. The Imam said, 'It is easy to know the weight of the chains.' He had a large container brought to them and asked the slave to stand in it. Then, the Imam brought down the chain and tied some string to it and filled the container with water. Then, he pulled up the chain with the string until all the chains were pulled out of water. He, then, had the basin filled with pieces of iron until the water reached the former level. He finally said, 'Weigh the pieces of iron whose weight is the same as that of the chains.' A solution of the problem was thus found.[2]

4. A woman was in a desert when she was afflicted by extreme thirst. She was forced to implore a nearby shepherd for water to drink. The shepherd agreed, on condition that she consented to be at his disposal. The second caliph consulted 'Alī and he said: 'The woman was in dire need; therefore, there is no decree of punishment upon her.'[3] Such accounts bear out 'Alī's comprehensive knowledge of the principles of the law, and of their applications in the form of legal rulings, basing himself always on Qur'anic teachings and prophetic hadiths.
5. Once a mad woman committed adultery, and 'Umar found her guilty, ordering that she be punished accordingly. However, 'Alī reminded the caliph of a prophetic hadith, preventing such

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[1] Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 10, p. 50, legal rulings on adultery, hadith 188.

[2] Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 9.

[3] Al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 8, p. 236; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 81; *Ghadīr*, vol. 6, p. 120.

punishment. According to that hadith, three groups – including those affected with a psychiatric disorder – are excused.[1]

6. A pregnant woman confessed to having committed illicit intercourse. The caliph ordered that her punishment be death by stoning. Again, 'Alī rejected this verdict, saying: 'You can rule over her life but not over the child in her womb.'[2]
7. Occasionally 'Alī would solve legal problems by recourse to psychological principles. One day a woman denied that she was the mother of her son, claiming to be a virgin, while the young man insisted that she was his mother. The caliph ordered the young man to be whipped. Soon 'Alī learned about this and asked permission from the woman's relatives to be the woman's representative (*wakīl*) and in this capacity to arrange her marriage to a man whom he, 'Alī, would choose for her. Then 'Alī addressed the young man who had been whipped, and said: 'I have made a marriage contract between you and this woman; the dowry is 480 dirhams'. Then 'Alī put the sum in front of the young man and continued: 'Do not come back to me before the sign of a consummated marriage appears on your face'. Upon hearing this the woman cried out: 'I take refuge in God: the outcome of this is fire! I swear by God that he is my son'. She then revealed the cause of her previous denial.[3]

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[1] Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 2, p. 95; *Ghadīr*, vol. 6, p. 102.

[2] *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 80; *Ghadīr*, vol. 6, p. 110.

[3] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 33; *Biḥār*, vol. 40, p. 277.

11

Intellectual Assistance to ʿUthmān and Muʿāwiyah

ʿAlī not only provided intellectual and religious guidance to the first two caliphs,but he also offered his advice to ʿUthmān. As a devout guardian of the religion of Islam, ʿAlī ceaselessly supported the political and intellectual requirements of Muslim society during the rule of the first caliphs. Therefore, it is not surprising that ʿUthmān also enjoyed his direction and counsel but what is astonishing is that even Muʿāwiyah, despite all his animosity and hatred towards ʿAlī, frequently dispatched his covert agents in disguise to seek his guidance on religious, legal and intellectual matters. For instance, a Byzantine governor would occasionally ask Muʿāwiyah certain questions of a doctrinal or legal nature. In order to preserve his status – after all, he claimed to be the caliph of Islam – Muʿāwiyah would send someone to seek guidance from ʿAlī. A few cases, pertaining both to ʿUthmān and Muʿāwiyah, will be given here:

1. Among the legal rights pertaining to women in Islam is this one: if a man and his wife divorce, and the man dies then before the wife completes her 'waiting period' (*ʿiddah*), the wife, just like other members of the family of the deceased, is entitled to her share of inheritance from her deceased husband as if the marriage contract were valid.

During ʿUthmān's caliphate there was the case of a man who had two wives, one from the community of the Helpers, and the other from the Banū Hāshim. The man officially terminated his marriage to his Helper wife and then died a few days later. The divorced woman approached the caliph insisting that her *'iddah* was not yet over and that she was therefore entitled to her share of inheritance. The caliph was unable to pass judgement and asked 'Alī to resolve the matter. 'Alī declared: 'If the woman testifies that she has not undergone her third cycle of menstruation since her husband's death, she is entitled to her share of the inheritance'. 'Uthmān summoned the other Hāshimī wife of the dead man, and conveyed this judgement to her; 'Uthmān then went on to say: 'This is your cousin's judgement. I have no opinion on this matter'. The woman replies: 'I am satisfied with 'Alī's arbitration.'[1] This case is also reported in a slightly different way by some Sunni scholars, in a manner which does not conform to the legal decisions of the Shi'a scholars.[2]

2. According to Qur'an 5:96 a man clothed in pilgrim's garb in order to perform either *'umrah* or hajj is not permitted to hunt land animals. But the question arises: if a person who is not a pilgrim hunts the animal, can the pilgrim consume the meat? This was the basis of an incident which arose and following which the third caliph followed 'Alī's opinion. The caliph was of the opinion that eating such a meal was permitted to the pilgrim, and on one occasion he happened to be clothed in pilgrim's garb and was about to accept an invitation for just such a meal. When 'Alī opposed him on this, 'Uthmān changed his mind. 'Alī referred to an incident in the life of the Prophet. While on his pilgrimage to Mecca, the Prophet was invited to partake in such a meal, but he declined, saying: 'We are on pilgrimage, give this food to those who are not'. When 'Alī narrated this hadith, it was confirmed by twelve others. Then 'Alī added, 'The Prophet not only forbade us from eating such meat but also prohibited the consumption of the eggs of birds which have been hunted.'[3]
3. One of the firmly held principles of Islam is that a disbeliever shall be punished after his death. During 'Uthmān's caliphate, a man, intent upon disproving this principle, exhumed the skull of a known disbeliever and took it to the caliph, exclaiming: 'If disbelievers burn in the hellfire, then this skull should be hot, but my hands do not feel any heat'. The caliph, unable to respond, called

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[1] *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 166.

[2] See *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 3, p. 178; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 80.

[3] *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 3, p. 53; *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 2, p. 119.

for 'Alī. In order to refute the critic and to graphically demonstrate his point, 'Alī ordered a piece of iron and a flint to be brought to him. He then struck the iron with the flint, thus creating sparks. Then 'Alī said: 'When we touch the iron and the stone, we do not feel any heat, even though both of them contain heat and, in the right circumstances, we can feel the heat that they produce. What prevents the same principle from applying to the disbeliever burning in his grave?' 'Alī's convincing response pleased the caliph, and he uttered the words: 'Were it not for 'Alī, then indeed 'Uthmān would have been destroyed'.[1]

Mu'āwiyah Seeking Guidance from 'Alī

Many historical sources mention seven instances when Mu'āwiyah sought 'Alī's guidance. While always attempting to conceal his ignorance, Mu'āwiyah stealthily snatched guidance from the overflowing treasure chest of 'Alī's knowledge. As Udhaynah related, a wayfarer once asked Mu'āwiyah a question to which he replied: 'Take this matter to 'Alī'. The man responded: 'I am not inclined to ask 'Alī, I want your reply.' Mu'āwiyah then retorted: 'Why are you averse to asking a man about whom the Prophet has said, "'Alī has the same rank in relation to me as Aaron had in relation to Moses, except that after me there are no more prophets".' Mu'āwiyah then added: "Umar also asked 'Alī's help over various problems.'[2]

When Mu'āwiyah came to hear of 'Alī's martyrdom, he said: 'This is the death of understanding and knowledge'. Mu'āwiyah's brother then warned him, saying that the people of Syria must not hear such words from him.[3]

Below is a list of cases where Mu'āwiyah sought 'Alī's guidance:[4]

1. Mu'āwiyah asked 'Alī to decide the appropriate punishment for a thief who exhumed graves in order to steal.
2. Mu'āwiyah asked 'Alī to pass a sentence upon a man who claimed that he killed a person who was in the act of committing adultery with his wife.

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[1] *Ghadīr*, vol. 8, p. 214, quoting from al-'Āṣimī.

[2] *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 79.

[3] *Istī'āb*, vol. 2, p. 426.

[4] See *'Alī wa Khulafā'*, pp. 316–324.

3. Mu'āwiyah asked 'Alī to pass judgement upon two men quarrelling over a garment: one of them had two witnesses testifying that it belonged to him while the other man claimed that he bought the garment from a stranger.
4. Mu'āwiyah sought 'Alī's opinion when a man claimed that he had entered into a contract of marriage with the family of a particular woman, but the father of the bride sent another woman instead to the bridal chamber.
5. When a Byzantine governor sent a number of cosmological problems for Mu'āwiyah to resolve, the latter anonymously sought 'Alī's help in order to give the correct answers.
6. The same governor demanded that Mu'āwiyah answer correctly a second set of questions on the same subject as the pre-condition for paying taxes to him.
7. On the third occasion that a question came to Mu'āwiyah from the Byzantines court, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ cunningly sought the answer from 'Alī on behalf of Mu'āwiyah.

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12

ʿAlī's Contribution to Society

As we have previously pointed out, although the Imam was prevented from assuming political power after the death of the Prophet, this did not mean that he refrained from all significant affairs of the Muslim community; on the contrary, this period witnessed major contributions from the Imam in such diverse fields as doctrinal clarification and socio-economic development. Indeed, one cannot find any figure in the subsequent history of Islam equal to him in these fields.

The Imam was not the kind of person to perceive society and its needs through one prism only, that of the caliphate, from which he was barred; still less would he have relinquished his responsibilities and duties to the community simply on account of being excluded from the caliphate. Rather, he was fully conscious of his spiritual prerogatives and social responsibilities to the nascent Islamic community. Due to his deep wisdom and his abundant abilities, ʿAlī assumed the burden of various responsibilities; he followed Prophet Jacob's advice to his sons: '*And he said, "My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates...*"' (12:67).

The Imam's functions, accomplished during the rule of the first three caliphs, can be summarised under three main areas:

1. upholding the integrity of Muslim doctrinal principles in the face of critical attacks by Jewish and Christian authorities and scholars, replying to their questions, and refuting their criticisms;
2. directing and guiding the caliphs in their efforts to solve difficult problems – particularly in the legal domain;

3. performing social services, the most important of which we shall mention below.
    1. Almsgiving: It is sufficient to mention a Qur'anic verse which, according to a large number of exegetes, was revealed in relation to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: '*Those who give their wealth by night and day, secretly and openly*' (2:274). Although the verse refers to the personality and traits of 'Alī during the Prophet's lifetime, his generosity and his ceaseless protection of the poor and orphans, even after the Prophet's death, is amply demonstrated and recorded in a variety of historical sources.
    2. Freeing slaves: This is a principle which is strongly recommended in Islam. According to a prophetic hadith, 'In return for freeing a believing slave, God the Victorious, the Compeller, shall free every limb of the master, corresponding to each limb of the freed slave, from hellfire.'[1] In this field, as in so many respects, the Imam outstripped others in performing this service. According to Imam Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, 'Alī purchased one thousand slaves and freed them.[2] He did this from his own personal resources, and not from funds of the public treasury.
    3. Farming and tree planting: One of 'Alī's constant occupations, both during the period of the prophetic mission and thereafter, was farming and tree planting. A significant proportion of the Imam's social contribution took this form. In addition he also donated many of the lands which he had himself cultivated as *waqf* (inalienable charitable endowment). Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq said in this connection: 'The Commander of the Faithful dug the soil and extracted God's hidden bounties.'[3] 'Alī himself once said: 'No job is more beloved to God than farming.'[4]

It is recorded that someone observed one *wasaq* (about 180 kilograms) of date-stones piled up in front of the Imam. He asked: 'What is the purpose of such a pile?' The Imam replied: 'God willing, all of them shall turn into palm trees'. The narrator adds that 'Alī planted those date-stones and a palm-plantation appeared which was donated as a *waqf*.[1]

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[1] *Rawḍih-i Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 181.

[2] *Furū' al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 74; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 43.

[3] *Furū' al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 74; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 43.

[4] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 23, p. 20.

4. Digging watercourses: In the dry and hot conditions of a land like the Arabian peninsula, watercourses are of paramount importance. According to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Prophet entrusted one of the *anfāl* lands[2] to the Imam, who succeeded in digging there a gushing canal; he called it Yanbu'. The abundance of water derived from this canal benefited the land greatly and delighted everyone in the area. One person who benefited from the canal's water expressed deep gratitude to the Imam. In reply, the Imam said: 'This canal is donated as a *waqf* to the pilgrims of the House of God, and travellers passing by this way; no one has the right to sell this water, and my descendants shall not inherit it as a legacy.'[3]

Even to this day, there is a place called Bi'r 'Alī ('Well of 'Alī') on the road from Medina to Mecca, where the Imam had dug a well. As is clear from several sayings of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Imam 'Alī likewise dug a number of wells along the road between Mecca and Kufa.[4]

5. Building mosques: One of the signs of believing in God and the hereafter is constructing or repairing mosques. 'Alī constructed a number of mosques, several of which are recorded in the sources. For instance, the Fatḥ mosque in Medina, a mosque besides the shrine of Ḥamzah, as well as three mosques in Mīqāt, Kufa, and Basra.[5]
6. Estates and properties endowed as *waqf*: The detailed lists of the estates and properties endowed by 'Alī as *waqf* can be found in various hadith collections and historical sources. It is noteworthy that, according to some authentic sources, the annual income of these endowments was forty thousand dinars; the entire amount of which was donated to the poor.

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[1] Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 323; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 61, p. 33.

[2] Lands occupied by Muslims without any warfare or any blood having been shed in their appropriation; such land was held and administered by the Messenger for the benefit of the community.

[3] *Furū' al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 543; *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 13, p. 303.

[4] *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 323; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 32.

[5] *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 323; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 32.

> Yet, in order to provide for himself and his family, the Imam was once forced to sell his own sword.[1] Why, one might ask, did the Imam not leave anything as personal inheritance? Surely, it was on account of what the Prophet had said: 'Nothing will reach one who dies and leaves this world, except three things: a pious offspring asking for his parent's forgiveness; a good tradition (*sunnah*) to prevail among the people; and good works, whose traces and consequences remain after his death'. [2]

The contracts by which 'Alī established his *waqf* properties are not only sources of inspiration in the field of law pertaining to charitable donations, they also bear witness to the magnitude of the Imam's generosity and contribution to the social and economic welfare of the Muslim community. For more information on these legal documents, see Volume 13 of the work *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, the chapter on *Wuqūf wa al-Ṣadaqāt.*

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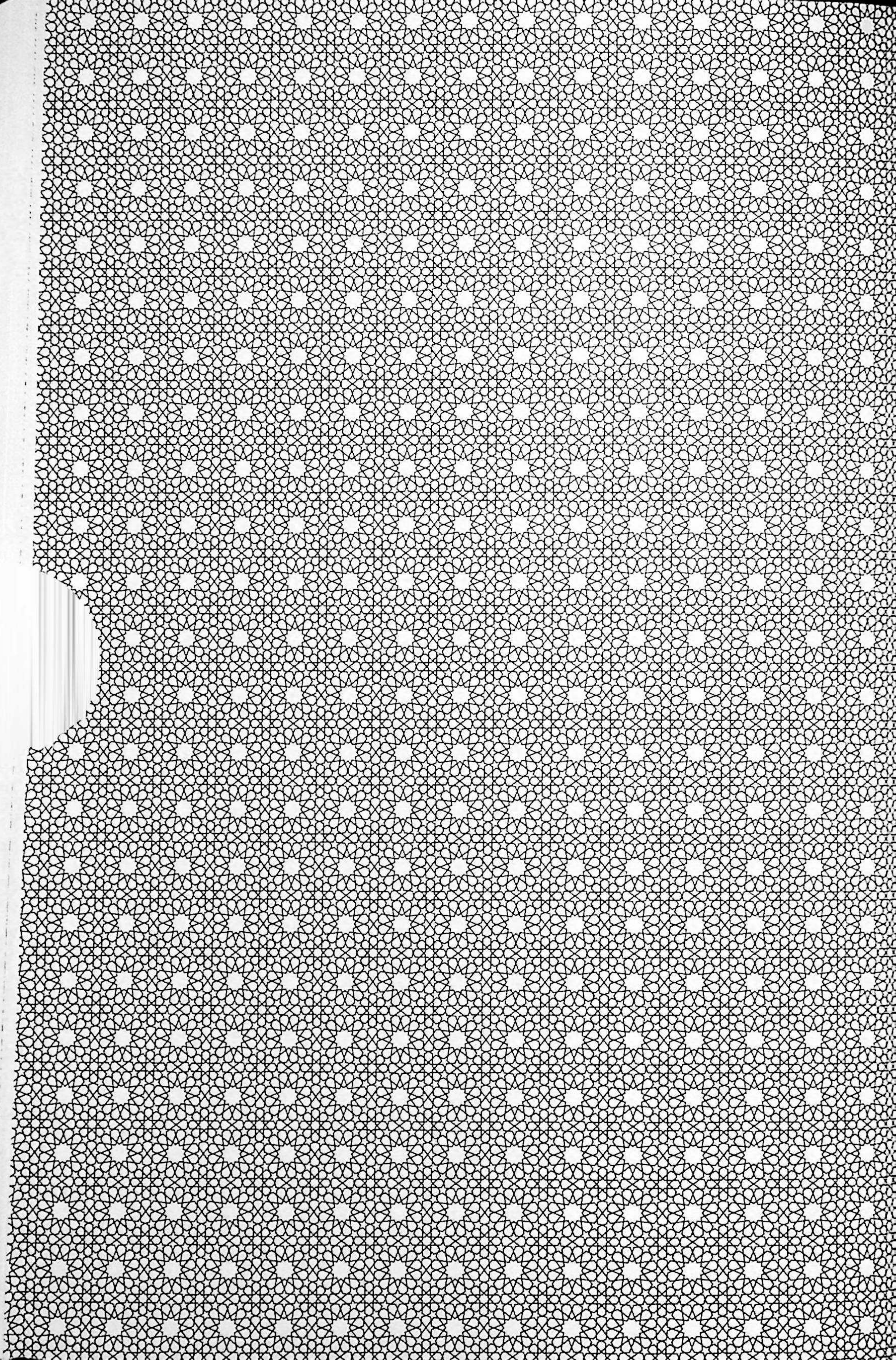
[1] *Kashf al-Maḥajjah*, p. 124; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 41, p. 43.

[2] *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 13, p. 292.

Part 5

Imam ʿAlī's Caliphate



1

The Causes of Support for ʿAlī's Caliphate

We have now completed our account of the events of the first four periods of ʿAlī's life. The fifth period of his life is now to be evaluated, that period in which he assumes the caliphate, and is confronted by a host of complex and demanding issues. To give a detailed account of each of these, together with their corresponding events, would take us beyond the bounds of this study; therefore, as in the previous sections, we shall restrict our focus to the most significant events in this momentous period of the Imam's life.

The first issue to address is the process by which the Migrants and the Helpers were impelled to support ʿAlī's assumption of the caliphate, and to do so in a manner which had no parallel either before, in the case of the first three caliphs, or after the Imam's caliphate. After the Messenger's death, the number of the Imam's supporters was very little, such that they constituted a tiny minority. In fact, apart from a few pious men from among the Migrants and the Helpers, no one else manifested any support for ʿAlī's caliphate. Twenty-five years later, however, conditions had changed to such an extent that the community could accept nobody as caliph but ʿAlī. Following ʿUthmān's assassination, a large number of people rushed to make their pledge of allegiance to him. The major reason for this wave of support for the Imam must be sought in the bitter events characterising the caliphate of ʿUthmān; events which generated a revolutionary movement against the caliph, and led eventually to his assassination by the revolutionaries of Egypt and Iraq, who had resolved not to return to their homes until they had rectified the state structure.

The Roots of the Uprising against 'Uthmān

The principal motivation behind the rebellion against the caliphate of 'Uthmān was his excessive attachment to his clan, the Umayyads. For the sake of the prestige and the prosperity of this clan, he not only disregarded the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, but also departed from the conduct of the two previous caliphs. This bias for his clan was well known, such that when the second caliph was appointing the members of the *shūrā* he said, regarding 'Uthmān: 'I see that the Quraysh will choose you as their leader, and that will establish the authority of the Banū Umayyah and Banū Abī al-Mu'ayṭ over the people, ensuring their ownership of the public treasury. Surely, this will result in the uprising of angry Arabs against you, who will kill you in your own home.'[1]

Indeed, fully aware of Uthmān's tendencies and character, the Umayyads clustered around him after his appointment as caliph, and after a very short time, all the prominent positions of power and influence were divided up between them. Their audacity reached such proportions that Abū Sufyān went triumphantly to the grave of Ḥamzah, the Prophet's uncle, who was killed in the Battle of Uḥud against Abū Sufyān, and declared: 'O Abū Ya'lā, rise and see that what we fought for is now in our hands'. In the early days of 'Uthmān's caliphate, the Umayyad family gathered together, and Abū Sufyān said: 'Now that the caliphate has passed from the clans of Taym and 'Adī, now it is in your hands. Guard it well, and do not let it pass into anyone else's possession. Pass it, like a ball, from one to another. The goal of the caliphate is nothing but power and authority: paradise and hell do not exist!'[2] Because the spread of such an unacceptable statement would have damaged the name and reputation of the caliph, those present at the gathering tried to conceal it as much as possible. However, the reality of this sentiment and aspiration eventually manifested itself.

It was the third caliph's duty to punish Abū Sufyān as an apostate, according to the divine law. Regrettably, not only 'Uthmān refrained from enforcing the appropriate legal punishment, he bestowed great favours upon Abū Sufyān, and ensured that he received substantial financial rewards.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 187.

[2] *Istī'āb*, vol. 2, p. 690.

Causes of the Revolt

On 3 Muḥarram 24 / 9 November 644, 'Umar's *shūrā* appointed 'Uthmān as the caliph. But after twelve years, on 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 / 17 June 656, 'Uthmān was killed by a group of rebels consisting of some of the Migrants and the Helpers as well as a group of malcontents from Egypt and another from Iraq. The main causes of 'Uthmān's failure are explicitly described in the historical sources, although some historians, respecting the symbolic status of the caliphate, refrained from giving detailed analyses of the deeper causes of this revolt. The major causes of the revolt against 'Uthmān may be sketched out as follows:

1. disregard for Islamic law and, in particular, the sanctions required by the law (*ḥudūd Allāh*);
2. distributing public funds among the Umayyad clan;
3. establishing the dynastic rule of the Umayyads through the appointment of unqualified clansmen as governors;
4. afflicting grievous injury to some of the Prophet's companions who had protested against 'Uthmān's policies;
5. exiling a group of noble companions whose presence was inconvenient and uncomfortable for the caliph.

We can now proceed to a brief analysis of each of these factors.

1. Disregard for Islamic Law

a) The caliph appointed his step-brother, Walīd ibn 'Utbah, as governor of Kufa. As stated by some sources, two Qur'anic verses were revealed in relation to him and his wrongdoings, his *fisq* or wickedness, and disobedience of divine law.[1] Yet the caliph ignored Walīd's ignominious past and appointed him governor of one of the most important provinces of the Islamic state.

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[1] See Qur'an 49:6, '*O you who have faith! If a profligate* [*person*] *should bring you some news, verify it*' and 32:18, '*Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal.*' After the revelation of this latter verse, the famous poet Hassān ibn Thābit composed the following lines of poetry: 'God has revealed in His glorious scripture, | A verse in the Qur'an pertaining to 'Alī and to Walīd. | So discern well between Walīd, personification of *fisq* | And 'Alī, the heart of sincere *īmān*.' Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 103.

For one who is characterised as a *fāsiq*, observance of religious laws and norms of propriety are of no importance. It is important to recall that in those days, the governor of a province was also the imam of the congregational prayers. On one occasion, Walīd led the dawn prayer, but was so drunk – to the extent that his ring was pulled from his finger without him realising it – that he performed four *rak'ah*s (units of prayer) instead of two. A delegation from Kufa went to Medina to inform the caliph of their governor's misconduct. Instead of responding appropriately to their allegation, the caliph instead accused them, and demanded: 'Did you see my brother actually drinking wine?' They replied: 'We did not, but we all witnessed the effects of it in his state of drunkenness. He was so drunk that his ring was lifted from his finger without him even being aware of it.'

The delegation of witnesses, consisting of senior members of the Muslim community, informed 'Alī and 'Ā'ishah of what had transpired. 'Ā'ishah bitterly complained about 'Uthmān and said: "Uthmān has abandoned the legal rulings and religious sanctions and instead issues accusations against the witnesses!' Consequently, 'Alī went to 'Uthmān and reminded him of what 'Umar had said at the time of the *shūrā*. He added: 'Do not make the Umayyad clan the rulers of the people; remove Walīd from his position and mete out to him the treatment he deserves according to the divine law.'

Ṭalḥah and Zubayr likewise demanded that the caliph depose Walīd and have him whipped. Under such public pressure, the caliph removed Walīd and appointed Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, another member of the Umayyad clan, as governor of Kufa. When he arrived, Ibn 'Āṣ cleansed the *miḥrāb* and *minbar* as well as the governor's seat, sending Walīd to Medina. Walīd's dismissal was not enough for the public appeasement. The caliph was responsible for exercising the divine punishment laid down for drunkards, even to his step-brother. Due to his affection, 'Uthmān clothed his brother elegantly seated in a room for any Muslim to exercise the punishment. A number of the Muslims desired to punish him but being threatened by Walīd, they failed to punish him. Finally the Imam, having absolutely no fear of Walīd, seized a whip and beat him accordingly.[1]

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[1] *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. 1, p. 142; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 318; Ibn Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 5, p. 91; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 42; *Ghadīr*, vol. 8, p. 172, quoting from Balādhurī's *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 33.

b) One of the crucial and necessary pillars of social life is the rule of an efficacious law for protecting the rights of all human beings. The highest ideals of social justice can only be realised if theory is translated into practice, in a manner which disregards all prejudice and partiality. The divinely guided leaders are those who, regardless of friend and foe, objectively implement the law and establish justice. In Islam, the Messenger's tradition provides an exemplary model for implementing justice, for that tradition provides us with a living paradigm of the justice defined and elaborated upon in the Qur'an, as a whole, and in particular, as regards the need for impartiality, the following verse: '*not fearing the blame of any blamer*' (5:54). The Prophet's short statement concerning the case of Fāṭimah al-Makhzūmiyyah manifests a profound teaching on the right manner of implementing social justice disregarding all partiality, and with complete indifference as regards the rank of the person with whom one is dealing.

Fāṭimah al-Makhzūmiyyah was a well-known lady but she was found guilty of the crime of theft. A group of people interceded to try and prevent her hand from being amputated. For this purpose Usāmah ibn Zayd was sent to the Prophet for mediation. The Messenger of God became deeply disturbed and said:

> The calamities that struck previous nations were on account of their disregard for justice. If a renowned person stole, it was overlooked and forgiven, but the same act from some unknown person would meet with immediate punishment. I swear by God that Fāṭimah al-Makhzūmiyyah and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad are both equal before the divine law.[1]

This was the Prophet's attitude towards implementing justice and the divine law. But unfortunately, after his departure, racial and class discrimination began to influence Islamic society. Especially during the rule of the second caliph the issue of Arab racial supremacy reared its head; however, at that time this tendency did not result in any major ruptures as regards the fabric of society. But, during the caliphate of 'Uthmān, the disregard for justice reached its climax and engendered major disturbances, leading to ever-increasing opposition to the caliph and his Umayyad clique.

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[1] *Istī'āb*, vol. 4, p. 374.

In preceding chapters we have referred to the second caliph's assassination by the Iranian slave of Mughīrah ibn Shuʿbah. Although the murder of the caliph was a matter of great moment, it was nonetheless absolutely illegal for the son of the caliph or any members of his family to kill the murderer and murderer's family without any substantiated evidence or any kind of duly constituted trial procedures. 'Ubayd Allāh, the second caliph's son, killed two innocent persons, Hurmuzān and Jufaynah the daughter of Abū Lu'lu', accusing them of participating in the conspiracy to murder his father. 'Ubayd Allāh's intention was to kill all the prisoners of war in Medina, but his sword was taken and he was stopped by one of the Prophet's companions.

'Ubayd Allāh's act caused turmoil and outrage in Medina, especially among the Migrants and the Helpers. There was great pressure on the caliph to punish 'Ubayd Allāh for killing Hurmuzān and the daughter of Abū Lu'lu'.[1] More than anyone, the Imam stood firm on the need to punish 'Ubayd Allāh. Addressing the caliph, he emphatically said: 'Avenge the blood of these innocent Muslims killed by 'Ubayd Allāh; he has committed a capital offence by killing them'. Realising that the caliph was doing his best to avoid punishing 'Ubayd Allāh, the Imam turned to 'Ubayd Allāh and said: 'The day I get hold of you, I shall avenge the blood of Hurmuzān.'[2]

More and more people condemned 'Uthmān for his negligence in refusing to punish the murderer. When the caliph felt the dangers swelling up around him, he ordered 'Ubayd Allāh to leave Medina for Kufa, bestowing upon him a large piece of land, later called 'The Small Kufa of the Son of 'Umar' (Kuwayfat Ibn 'Umar).

Unjustifiable Excuses

In defence of the third caliph, a number of Muslim historians provided some unjustifiable excuses, which are not even at the level of nursery school, let alone the level of serious intellectual debate. Nonetheless, we can briefly address them here.

1. Regarding 'Ubayd Allāh's case, 'Uthmān consulted 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, who said: 'Hurmuzān's killing took place during the rule of the

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[1] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* (Beirut edition), vol. 5, p. 17.

[2] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 24.

second caliph, when the reins of power were not in your hands; therefore, there is no burden of responsibility upon you'. The answer to this excuse is very clear. Firstly, it is the responsibility of any Muslim governor to reclaim the rights of an oppressed person from an oppressor. The passage of time or a change of leadership does not affect these responsibilities. Secondly, when the second caliph was informed that his son 'Ubayd Allāh had murdered Hurmuzān, he inquired about his son's intention. Some people said: 'It is reported that Abū Lu'lu' was instructed by Hurmuzān to assassinate you.' Then the caliph ordered: 'Ask my son if he has any witness to substantiate this charge; if there is one, then my blood money is to be purchased with Hurmuzān's blood; otherwise, punish my son accordingly.'[1] Is it not incumbent upon the succeeding caliph to execute the previous caliph's order – for no witness was found to substantiate the allegation of Hurmuzān's conspiracy to murder the second caliph?

2. Some historians have argued that although the blood of Hurmuzān and the little girl of Abū Lu'lu' was indeed unjustly shed, since Hurmuzān had no heirs, the caliph of the Muslims would be the only legal avenger of his blood. Therefore, exercising his power and right, as authorised by Islamic law, 'Uthmān pardoned and freed the murderer.[2] This second apology is no better than the previous one. Certainly, Hurmuzān could not be deprived of family or heirs, since, according to historical sources, he had been the governor of Shushtar.[3] So, it was the duty of the caliph to ask about his family and relatives and to act accordingly. Furthermore, assuming that Hurmuzān was without any heir, and that his 'blood' belonged to all of the Muslims, one might argue that, on condition that the Muslims as a whole agreed to the pardon, the caliph could act on their behalf and pardon 'Ubayd Allāh. However, this condition was not fulfilled, and apart from a few Muslims, the majority rightly demanded that 'Ubayd Allāh be properly punished.[4] When the caliph was preparing to pardon and free 'Ubayd Allāh, the

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[1] Al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 8, p. 61.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, vol. 9, p. 305.

[4] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 5, p. 17.

Imam protested and said: 'The caliph has no right to disregard the legitimate rights of the Muslims'.[1] Moreover, according to Sunni jurisprudence, the members of the family have the right to punish a killer or to receive blood money, but they are not allowed to pardon a murderer.[2]

3. Some scholars have said: 'If 'Ubayd Allāh had been killed, the enemies of the Muslims would have had the opportunity to criticise the Muslims for killing their caliph and subsequently killing his own son as well!'[3] This excuse has no validity from the Qur'anic perspective or from that of the prophetic tradition. On the contrary, the proper punishment meted out to a powerful personality would only have further enhanced the reputation of Muslim society in respect of justice, and it would testify to the incorruptibility of the judicial system of Islam. Everyone, regardless of his social status, is equal in the eyes of the law. What encourages the enemy is a situation in which Muslim leaders and governors play with divine law according to their political interests, their personal greed and their whimsical desires.
4. It is reported that 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr testified that he had seen Abū Lu'lu', Hurmuzān, and Jufaynah whispering together. When they separated a two-pointed dagger fell on the ground. It was this dagger with which the caliph was killed.[4] This excuse, were it to be brought before an Islamic court of justice, is untenable, for there is but one sole witness who observes only a scene in which old friends and a daughter are talking to each other. It is also possible that Hurmuzān, in that gathering, was trying to prevent Abū Lu'lu' from committing the intended crime. In any court of law, assumptions and insinuations are inadmissible as evidence.

In any event, the killer of Hurmuzān went free, while the Imam warned him that one day he would avenge Hurmuzān's blood.[5] It is interesting to note that at the time of the Imam's caliphate, 'Ubayd Allāh escaped from Kufa to Syria, yet the Imam declared: 'He may have escaped today but one day he shall be captured'. Not long later, at the Battle of Ṣiffīn, 'Ubayd Allāh was indeed killed – either by the Imam, Mālik al-Ashtar, or 'Ammār ibn Yāsir.

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[1] Qāmūs al-Rijāl, vol. 9, p. 305, quoted from Shaykh al-Mufīd's *Jamal*.

[2] *Ghadīr* (Najaf edition) vol. 8 p. 141, quoted from Hanafī's *Badāyi' al-Ṣanāyi'*.

[3] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 41.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 24.

2. Distribution of Public Funds among the Umayyads

The most revered position among the Muslims was succession to the Messenger of God. Whether the successor be chosen by God or elected by the people, the position was, needless to say, highly respected. It was for this reason that the Imam, on behalf of the people, addressed the third caliph and said: 'I adjure you by God! Do not be; do not be the murdered leader of this *ummah*, for it is prophesied: a leader of this *ummah* will be killed, and this will open the way to killing and fighting until the Day of Resurrection'.[1]

In spite of holding such a highly esteemed position, the third caliph was indeed killed. A number of prominent Muslim personalities gathered in Medina, were assisted by the Migrants and the Helpers, and proceeded to assassinate the third caliph. They then returned to their respective provinces. From a historical perspective, the main reasons for the revolt, apart from unjust judicial procedures, were the misappropriation of public funds – the main beneficiaries being 'Uthmān's family and, more widely, the Umayyad clan. The unjustifiable apportioning of public wealth was so excessive that even al-Ṭabarī stated explicitly: 'In order to limit the damage to the sensibilities of the majority of the Muslims, I will refrain from writing a detailed account of the public criticism of the time, and the widespread condemnation of the third caliph.'[2] However, the calamitous events manifest clearly the parlous state of affairs at the time of 'Uthmān's caliphate. The caliph exercised unlimited generosity towards his own clan, milking the public treasury for this purpose.

In previous chapters we have referred to the dispute over the village of Fadak, a dispute which so sadly pitted the noble Messenger's daughter, Fāṭimah, against the first caliph, Abū Bakr. This village was given as a gift to Marwān ibn Ḥakam and remained in the possession of the Umayyads from one generation to the next, until 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz finally returned it to the descendants of Fāṭimah. 'My father granted Fadak to me but Abū Bakr claimed that it was part of the trust of the public, and that its assets were to be utilised for the welfare of the Muslims', declared Fāṭimah.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 159.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, pp. 108, 113, 232.

Regarding this issue, many commentators reprimanded 'Uthmān for allowing the Messenger's charitable estate to become part of Marwān's private property.[1] Alas, this was not the only case of its kind, for the boundless generosity of the caliph towards the Umayyad clan went far beyond just this one case. In the year 27 AH / 648 CE, the Islamic army returned from Africa with spoils estimated at two and a half million dinars. Despite the Qur'anic rulings on the subject (see Qur'an 8:41), and without any valid reason, 'Uthmān bestowed one fifth of it to his son-in-law, Marwān. With this act he inflamed the people to such a degree that a poet wrote: 'To protect your own family, you unjustly bestowed upon Marwān one fifth of [the spoils], which were due for the poor.'[2]

The Public Treasury in the Islamic Perspective

Every action is an expression and a prolongation of a belief in a principle or at least of a view or an opinion. The caliph's actions proved that he considered the public treasury as his private property, to be dispensed as he wished; in fact, he regarded his generosity towards his relatives as an act of charity. But this is clearly incompatible with the clear rulings and norms of Islam.

1. A prophetic hadith clearly declares that 'One fifth of the spoils belongs to God and the remainder is for the army.'[3] It is obvious that what belongs to God refers to the disbursement of funds in accordance with what meets with divine approval.
2. At the time of sending Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, the Messenger ordered him to tell the people: 'It is God's decree that almsgiving (*zakāh*) are incumbent upon you. It will be taken from the rich and shall be given to the needy.'[4]
3. The Imam wrote to his governor in Mecca: 'Examine whatever you have accumulated from what belongs to God, then distribute it among the needy. Be careful, it must reach the poor'. As reported

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[1] Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Ma'ārif*, p. 84.

[2] Al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 6, p. 324.

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Amwāl*, p. 580.

by historical sources, on one occasion, two women, one Arab and the other a non-Arab, approached the Imam for help. Apart from giving them food, he also gave forty dirhams to each woman. The non-Arab took her share and left, but the Arab asked: 'Do you give the same amount to an Arab as you have given to a non-Arab?' The Imam replied: 'I have not found any distinction between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac in the Book of God.'[1] Considering such facts, as well as the conduct of the first two caliphs which are in such stark contrast to that of 'Uthmān, the latter's nepotism is utterly unjustifiable. One could argue that exercising generosity towards certain distinguished companions might have been permissible, but, 'Uthmān's open-handedness was limited to a small circle within his own clan.

Marwān ibn Ḥakam, a steadfast enemy of the Imam, was one of the Umayyad clan. He broke his allegiance with the Imam and was captured in the Battle of Jamal. Yet Marwān obtained his freedom due to Imam Ḥusayn's intercession. The Imam's sons remarked: 'Once more, Marwān shall give his allegiance to you.' The Imam said: 'I have no need for his allegiance. Did he not give his allegiance after 'Uthmān's death? His allegiance is like a pledge of the Jews: through cunning tricks and circumventions, it will be broken, as is well known. If today he pledges allegiance, tomorrow he will cunningly break it. For him governance is short, it goes only as far as a dog can lick his own nose. He is the father of four sons, and through them the Islamic community shall witness bloody days.'[2]

3. Establishment of Umayyad Dynastic Rule

The third reason for the revolt against the third caliph derived from the tyrannical domination of the Umayyad figures over most of the key provinces of the Islamic lands. 'Uthmān's generosity towards his relatives was at the heart of his policies, and put other affairs and interests of the Islamic caliphate in the shade. It is necessary to recall that 'Uthmān never had the same affection towards non-Umayyad companions like Abū Dharr, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, and so on. It is evident that he was extremely harsh with Abū Dharr, the old, revered companion and noble warrior, whom he banished to the hot dry land of Rabadhah where he remained until he died. Also, he had no pity when 'Ammār lost consciousness due to the beatings received from the caliph's agents.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 67.

[2] Al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, vol. 6, p. 348.

The caliph's generosity towards the Banū Abī Mu'ayṭ, as his clan was also called, was undeniable, and in this connection it is worth quoting the words uttered by the second caliph to Ibn 'Abbās: 'If 'Uthmān comes to hold the reins of the caliphate, he shall allow the children of Abī Mu'ayṭ to dominate the people. If he does this, the people shall kill him'.[1] When 'Umar established the *shūrā* for selecting the third caliph, he said to 'Uthmān: 'If you acquire the caliphate, have fear of God and do not allow the family of Abī Mu'ayṭ to dominate the people.' When Walīd ibn 'Utbah was appointed governor of Kufa, the Imam, Ṭalḥah, and Zubayr repeated 'Umar's advice to 'Uthmān but to no avail.[2] Unfortunately, 'Uthmān – being overwhelmed with such intense affection for his family – entrusted most of the key posts of the Islamic government to the Umayyads who immediately began to accumulate enormous amounts of wealth. In fact, 'Uthmān was but following the instruction of the old Umayyad chief, Abū Sufyān, who went to see him on the very day he was appointed caliph and, when he was sure that those in the house were all clansmen, advised 'Uthmān: 'Let us rotate the caliphate among us, from one to another'.[3]

Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī al-Yamanī was the governor of Kufa, and it was unacceptable for the Umayyads to allow such an important province to be governed by someone who was not in their clan. Consequently, Shibl ibn Khālid, in a private meeting of the Umayyads, asked 'Uthmān: 'Why has such a vast land been entrusted to Abū Mūsā?' The caliph said: 'Whom do you have in mind?' Shibl pointed at 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir, who at that time was only sixteen years of age.[4] It was this attitude that was again manifested when Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, the governor of Kufa, sat on the pulpit and said: 'Iraq is the pasture of the young men of Quraysh'. The long list of the Umayyad agents of 'Uthmān, traceable throughout historical sources, coincides with his following 'declaration': 'If the keys of paradise had been in my possession, I would give them to the Umayyads so that every last member of the clan might enter paradise'.[5] 'Uthmān's boundless generosity towards his family gradually perturbed the people, and it was this nepotism that above all else paved the way for the final rebellion against the caliph.

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[1] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 16.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

[3] *Istī'āb*, vol. 2, p. 690.

[4] See al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*.

[5] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 62.

The day 'Uthmān acceded to power, he removed Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah as governor of Kufa and appointed in his stead Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. It seemed to be a correct decision, but one year later Sa'd was also removed and 'Uthmān's step-brother Walīd ibn 'Utbah ibn Abī Mu'ayṭ was appointed to this post. In the year 27 AH / 648 CE, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, head of the treasury of Egypt, was dismissed and 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ, the caliph's foster brother, was appointed to this position instead. In the year 30 AH / 651 CE, the governorship of Basra was removed from Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and bestowed upon the young 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir, 'Uthmān's maternal cousin.[1] The above cases clearly indicate 'Uthmān's intention to establish the rule and government of an Umayyad dynasty.

4. Abusing and Defaming the Prophet's Companions

It is a source of considerable sorrow and distress that some of the senior companions of the Prophet did not receive from 'Uthmān the respect and kindness owed to them. Two cases will suffice to clarify the nature of the third caliph's attitude in this regard.

a) 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd. This prominent companion of the Prophet acquired a special status in the early history of Islam. His strong faith, his perseverance, and his crucial role in the spread of Islamic teachings are amply documented in the historical sources.[2] He was one of the first companions who endangered his life for the sake of the consolidation and expansion of the faith. He had the courage to recite some verses of the Qur'an in the holy sanctuary of the Ka'bah, right next to the Quraysh meeting centre. It was midday when some chiefs of the Quraysh tribe had gathered for discussion; suddenly 'Abd Allāh stood in front of the Maqām Ibrāhīm (i.e. the station of Abraham, a few metres away from the Ka'bah), and began to recite some verses of Sūrah al-Raḥmān. The Quraysh chiefs asked each other in astonishment: 'What is Ibn Umm 'Abd saying?' One remarked: 'He is reciting verses of the Qur'an which have been revealed to Muḥammad'. At this point all

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[1] See al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*.

[2] *Istī'āb*, vol. 1, p. 373; *Iṣābah*, vol. 2, p. 369. *Usd al-Ghābah*.

> rose and attacked him, trying to silence him. With a bleeding face, 'Abd Allāh returned to his companions. Hearing their worry and fear, he replied: 'The enemies of God have never been so low and abased in my eyes as they are today'. He continued: 'If you wish I will do tomorrow what I did today!' They said: 'This is enough, for they disliked that which they had to hear'.[1]

This is one of the golden scenes from 'Abd Allāh's life. He is among the six companions in relation to whom the following verse was revealed: *'Do not drive away those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening desiring His face. Neither are you accountable for them in any way, nor are they accountable for you in any way, so that you may drive them away and thus become one of the wrongdoers'* (6:52).[2]

Meting out harsh conduct on such a prominent companion of the Prophet is unbelievable, but this is indeed what the third caliph did. After Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ was removed, Walīd ibn 'Utbah replaced him as governor of Kufa. The latter demanded the keys of the treasury. 'Abd Allāh refused. Walīd reported the incident to 'Uthmān. In turn, 'Uthmān dispatched a letter to 'Abd Allāh reprimanding him for his refusal to comply. Under pressure from the caliph, 'Abd Allāh finally threw the keys at the governor and said: 'How times have changed! Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ has been removed and Walīd takes his place! The Truth is expressed in the words of God and the best conduct is in the Prophet's tradition, and both alike teach us that the worst thing is innovation (*bid'ah*). Anything which is not rooted in the divine law, is innovation, and every innovation leads to deviation, and every deviation leads to hellfire.' After saying these words, he departed for Medina, where 'Uthmān had summoned him. The people of Kufa tried to support him against the new governor, but 'Abd Allāh, in response, told them: 'I should obey the caliph's instruction and I have no desire to be an instigator of rebellions and disturbances.'

Upon arrival in Medina, 'Abd Allāh went immediately to the Prophet's mosque where the caliph was on the pulpit giving an address. Al-Balādhurī writes: 'When 'Uthmān's eyes caught 'Abd Allāh, he turned to the people and said: "Just this moment a tiny and smelly animal has entered and joined you: a creature who walks on his own food, then vomits and contaminates the food". When 'Abd Allāh heard this he replied: "I am not what you describe. I am a companion of the Prophet, a participant in the Battle of Badr, and a loyal adherent to the *bayʿat al-riḍwān* (the pledge of good pleasure).'"

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 337.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, p. 128; Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 319.

Then 'Ā'ishah cried out: "Uthmān! How can you insult one of the companions of the Messenger in such a manner?' In order to prevent further outbursts, the caliph ordered 'Abd Allāh to leave the mosque. While Ibn Zamʿah flung him to the ground, 'Uthmān's slave, Jaḥum, then picked him up and threw him back to the ground so hard that his ribs broke. The Imam protested: 'How can you torture a companion of the Prophet on the basis of Walīd's fabrications?' Then he took 'Abd Allāh to his house. 'Uthmān barred him from leaving Medina, so that, until his death in 32 AH / 653 CE (three years before the assassination of 'Uthmān) he remained in Medina.[1] While sick in bed, many friends and relatives visited 'Abd Allāh. One day 'Uthmān paid him a visit and the following conversation took place:

'Uthmān: 'What are you worried about?'

'Abd Allāh: 'My sins'.

'Uthmān: 'What do you want?'

'Abd Allāh: 'God's infinite mercy'.

'Uthmān: 'Shall I call a physician?'

'Abd Allāh: 'It is the one true Physician that has made me ill.'

'Uthmān: 'Shall I order that the stipend owed to you be paid?' [his salary had been stopped for two years].

'Abd Allāh: 'The day I needed, you withheld it. Now you want to pay when I have no need for it'.

'Uthmān: 'It will be for your children and next of kin'.

'Abd Allāh: 'God is the Provider (*al-Razzāq*)'.

'Uthmān: 'Pray to God to forgive me'.

'Abd Allāh: 'I want God to exact my rights from you'.

When 'Abd Allāh felt close to death, he appointed 'Ammār, or Zubayr, as the executor of his will, instructing them to prevent 'Uthmān from praying over his body. Hence, they performed the funeral prayer and buried his body at night. When 'Uthmān heard about it, he reprimanded 'Ammār for not informing him. 'Ammār replied: 'His will made it clear that you were not to be permitted to pray for him.' Listening to this dialogue, Zubayr recited this poem:

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[1] *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, vol. 1, p. 138.

After my death, I can see you lamenting over me;
Yet when I was alive you deprived me of my rights.

Such oppressive behaviour towards a highly respected companion and a renowned reciter (*qārī*) of the Qur'an – one whom the Imam had praised thus: 'He learned the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition to the utmost, and this knowledge is indeed sufficient for his salvation'.[1] Such reprehensible behaviour on the part of the third caliph could not but instil in the minds of the people a bad opinion of the caliphate, and a desire for rectifying such appalling behaviour. This only exacerbated the opposition to 'Uthmān, and contributed significantly to the unrest which led to the revolution against his caliphate; that which is not supposed to happen then came to pass.

b) 'Ammār ibn Yāsir. Like 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir was also the recipient of the harshness and severity of the caliph. His sad story begins when 'Uthmān distributed a collection of jewels from the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) among some members of his household. The public was inflamed by this flagrant act of favouritism. But it is said that in response the caliph sat on the pulpit and said: 'What we need from the treasury we take, and as for the protestors, we rub their noses in the dirt!' In reply to the caliph, the Imam said: 'You shall be stopped from performing such acts.' It is also reported that 'Ammār said: 'I swear by God that I will be the first one whose nose would be rubbed in the dirt!' 'Uthmān angrily responded: 'How dare you to say such a thing? Arrest him!' The agents got hold of him and he was beaten unconscious. Then 'Ammār's friends took him to the house of Umm Salamah, a wife of the Prophet. When 'Ammār regained consciousness, he said: 'I give my thanks to God, this is not the first time I have been attacked.'

This incident was reported to 'Ā'ishah, who immediately brought out the Messenger's hair, shoes, and clothes; confronting 'Uthmān she cried out: 'The Messenger's hair, clothes, and shoes are not worn out, but you have already abandoned his traditions'. 'Uthmān was agitated but remained silent. While Umm Salamah cared for the old companion of her noble husband, a number of visitors who were allies of 'Ammār from the tribe of Banū Makhzūm came to visit him. This caused 'Uthmān to protest and Umm Salamah replied: 'It is you who are responsible for people taking such actions'.[1]

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[1] *'Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 36; Ibn al-Kathīr, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 7, p. 163.

The author of *al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (attributed to Ibn Qutaybah), has narrated this incident in a different way. A group of the companions of the Prophet composed a letter enumerating the misdemeanours of the caliph:

1. in a number of cases, the caliph had opposed the prophetic tradition as well as the conduct and actions of the *shaykhayn* (i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar);
2. one fifth of the spoils of war, which were supposed to be distributed among the Prophet's household as well as the poor and orphans, was instead bestowed upon Marwān ibn Ḥakam;
3. seven houses were built in Medina for his wife, Nā'ilah, and his daughters;
4. Marwān had built palaces in Medina for himself, using funds from the public treasury;
5. all of the key posts in the lands of Islam had been allocated to members of the Umayyad clan, several of whom were young and inexperienced, and who had never been in the presence of the Messenger of God;
6. the governor of Kufa, Walīd ibn 'Utbah, evidently drunk, performed four *rak'ah*s for the dawn congregational prayers at the mosque of Kufa; then he turned to the people while praying and said that if they wished, they could pray an additional *rak'ah*;
7. in spite of this act, 'Uthmān refrained from dealing with him in accordance with the appropriate religious sanctions;
8. the caliph had ceased consultation with the Helpers and the Migrants;
9. acting in the manner of a king, 'Uthmān appropriated the lands around Medina;

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[1] *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 48.

10. the caliph donated a large number of properties and vast lands to individuals who had never been companions of the Prophet, and who had never participated in the holy wars of the Prophet's mission; they failed to comprehend the Messenger's principles of Islam.

The list went on. A group of ten wrote this letter but for fear of reprisals, they abstained from signing the document. It was handed to 'Ammār to give to 'Uthmān. 'Ammār went to 'Uthmān's house, at a time when Marwān and a group of the Umayyads were with him. The letter was presented to the caliph. After reading it, the caliph turned to 'Ammār and said: 'Your audacity towards me has increased!' Then Marwān added: 'This black slave has provoked the people against you. If you kill him you will avenge yourself and others.' 'Uthmān gave the order to beat 'Ammār. He was beaten until he lost consciousness, and was thrown out of the house in that condition.

When Umm Salamah, the Prophet's wife, became aware of what had happened, she took him to her home. Members of the Banū al-Mughīrah tribe, who were allies of 'Ammār, became extremely disturbed. Consequently, before the congregational noon prayers, Hishām ibn Walīd turned to 'Uthmān in the mosque and said: 'If 'Ammār dies due to his injuries, I shall kill one of the Banū Umayyah tribe'. 'Uthmān replied: 'You are incapable of doing such a thing!' Then 'Uthmān confronted Imam 'Alī and they entered into an intense argument.[1]

5. Exile of Prominent Figures

A group of pious and distinguished companions of the Prophet was sent to exile by 'Uthmān. They were banished from Kufa to Damascus and then from Damascus to Ḥimṣ (Homs). This is one of the most painful scenes of Islamic history which will be elaborated upon below. Since the exile of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī is a well-known story,[2] we shall omit it here, and mention instead some reports of the exile of other companions.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 29.

[2] *Shakhsiyyat-hā-yi Islāmī-yi Shī'ih*, vol. 1, p. 8.

Exile of Mālik al-Ashtar and his Companions

We mentioned earlier that, under intense public pressure, 'Uthmān dismissed Walīd ibn 'Utbah and appointed Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ governor of Kufa, ordering the latter to be lenient with the reciters of the Qur'an (*qurrā'*) as well as with the notable personages there. As a result, the new governor gathered together Mālik and his associates – including Zayd and Ṣa'ṣa'ah, sons of Ṣawḥān – for discussion. Afterwards, Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ concluded that the conduct of Mālik and his friends were incompatible with the policies of the caliph. So, Sa'īd wrote to the caliph that, while Mālik al-Ashtar and his associates remain in Kufa, he is unable to discharge his duties as the governor of Kufa. In reply to the letter of Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, the caliph asked the latter to banish Mālik and his companions to Syria. The caliph also wrote a letter to Mālik to remind him that were he to manifest any of his hidden attitudes, he would allow the governor to eliminate him. Thus, he asked Mālik to leave Kufa for Syria. Following the instructions of the caliph, Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ banished to Syria a group of distinguished figures, including Mālik al-Ashtar, Zayd and Ṣa'ṣa'ah the sons of Ṣawḥān, Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha'ī, and Ḥārith 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamdānī. However, Mu'āwiyah, the governor of Syria, also feared the influence of the newly arrived group and its probable consequences, such as the rise of protests against the caliphate. As a result, Mu'āwiyah wrote a letter to the caliph, part of which reads as follows:

'You have banished a group to Syria, and they have turned Damascus and our province into a turbulent and corrupt place. I fear that soon Syria will end up like Kufa, endangering people's minds and their principles.' After receiving this letter, 'Uthmān feared the rise of further disturbances and ordered Mu'āwiyah to banish the group to Ḥims.[1] It has been reported that at first 'Uthmān decided to return them to Kufa, but, Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ persuaded him to change his mind. The major ostensible crime of this group of malcontents was, quite simply, their truthfulness. They wanted the caliph to act in accordance with the prophetic tradition. It was the duty of the caliph to send impartial and trustable officers to Kufa to investigate the situation objectively; instead, he relied entirely on the distorted reports of the governor of Kufa.

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[1] Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, vol. 5, pp. 39–43; for further details see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 360–368.

Who were the Exiled Men?

1. Mālik al-Ashtar. He had spent his early life in the companionship of the Prophet. His sound character was upheld by all; he has never been referred to as a weak transmitter of traditions in *rijālī* literature. The Imam described him in a way he has described no one else.[1] After hearing of Mālik's death, the Imam was full of remorse and said:

> Do you know who Mālik was? If he was from a range of mountains, then he would be the solitary highest peak therein, with no bird being able to fly to its summit. If he was from among the stones, then would he be the resolute, immovable boulder. Your death [O Mālik!] has saddened one world and delighted another. Weep for Mālik! Does he have any peer?[2]

2. Zayd ibn Ṣawḥān. As stated by Abū 'Amr in his *Istī'āb*: 'Zayd was a righteous man and a leading figure of his tribe. In the Battle of Qādisiyyah, he lost one of his arms and in the Battle of Jamal, fighting for the Imam, Zayd drank from the cup of martyrdom.'[3] According to Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī: 'Zayd spent his nights in prayer and his days in fasting.'[4]
3. Ṣa'ṣa'ah ibn Ṣawḥān. He was also a man of religion and integrity, just like his brother, Zayd.
4. 'Amr ibn Ḥamiq al-Khuzā'ī. He was a companion of the Prophet who transmitted a number of hadiths. When 'Amr quenched the Messenger's thirst with milk, the Prophet prayed that God would always provide him with benefit and well-being.[5]

This gives the reader a brief introduction to a few members of the exiled group. Others in the group were of similar spiritual status.

Another letter of complaint regarding Kufa's governor was signed and sent by Ka'b ibn 'Abduh to 'Uthmān. Abū Rabī'ah brought the letter to the caliph. When 'Uthmān read the letter, he inquired about those who had not signed the letter, but had participated in the writing of it. Abū Rabī'ah refrained from divulging the names. The caliph decided to chastise him but the Imam prevented the caliph from doing so. Then 'Uthmān ordered his governor in Kufa, Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, to whip Ka'b and banish him to Rayy.[1]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 38.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 77.

[3] *Istī'āb*, vol. 1, p. 197.

[4] Ibn Qutaybah, *Ma'ārif*, p. 176.

[5] *Tārīkh-i Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 439.

Another companion of the Prophet who was sent into exile was 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥanbal al-Jumaḥī. He was banished from Medina to Khaybar. In a verse of one of his poems, 'Abd al-Raḥmān criticised the caliph when the latter bestowed upon his kinsman, Marwān, one fifth of the spoils won in the wars fought in Africa.

You gave one fifth of the spoils to Marwān

Preferring him, and supporting your clan.

He remained in exile in Khaybar for as long as 'Uthmān was alive.[2]

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[1] *Ansāb*, vol. 5, pp. 41–43; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 372–373.

[2] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 150.

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Judging the Murder of ʻUthmān

The aforementioned factors gave rise to a veritable tidal wave of opposition throughout the various territories of the Islamic state. The opposition accused the third caliph and his agents of deviation from the accepted principles of Islam. It was due to this fact that a number of prominent companions frequently warned ʻUthmān about the chronic instability of the situation and the dire need of change before a revolution occurred. The following is a brief list of ʻUthmān's detractors; this list shows the gravity of the opposition to the caliph's policies.

1. Imam ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who delivered many critical remarks on the actions and attitudes of the third caliph. For example, on the day he called on the children of the Migrants to battle with the army of Syria, he said:

> O descendants of the Migrants, rise against the leaders of infidelity, and the remainder of the associates of Satan. March forward and fight with Muʻāwiyah, who has pretended to rise up to avenge the blood of one who carried the heavy burden of his own errors. I swear by God who created man by splitting a seed, that until the Day of Resurrection, he shall carry the sins of the others while this shall not reduce their sins either.[1]

During his speech on the second day of his caliphate, the Imam also said: 'Any piece of land granted by ʻUthmān, and any belongings of God he had given to anyone, all must be returned to the public treasury.'[1] These words of the Imam as well as what he uttered during the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon,[2] clearly manifest his opinion on the conduct of the third caliph.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 194 (new edition).

2. 'Ā'ishah, the Messenger's wife. Indeed, it was 'Ā'ishah who criticised 'Uthmān's conduct more than anyone else. As mentioned earlier, having been apprised of the attack of the caliph's agent on 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, 'Ā'ishah came out with the Prophet's garment and shoes and said loudly: 'O people! Look, the garments and shoes of the Prophet are not yet worn out, but you have already started forgetting his tradition!' While 'Uthmān's house was being besieged by the revolutionaries, 'Ā'ishah left Medina for Mecca to perform the hajj pilgrimage. Before her departure Marwān ibn Ḥakam, Zayd ibn Thābit, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Attāb tried to change her mind, since her stay in Medina could prevent further untoward events, but, 'Ā'ishah refused and said: 'I wish I could tie a stone on you and your friend's ['Uthmān's] feet and fling you all into the sea or put him ['Uthmān] in a bag, shoulder the burden of dragging it, and throw him into the sea!'[3]

'Ā'ishah's critical remarks about 'Uthmān have already been mentioned. Her criticism continued until 'Uthmān's assassination. On her return from Mecca, at a place called Sarf halfway to Medina, she was informed about the assassination of the caliph and the people's pledge of allegiance to the Imam. Astonishingly, she abruptly changed her whole attitude to 'Uthmān. 'I wish the sky had fallen on my head...Take me back to Mecca', she exclaimed. 'I swear by God that 'Uthmān has innocently been murdered and I shall avenge him!' Meantime, a person who had reported 'Uthmān's assassination plucked up the courage to say: 'You are the first one to change your words. Before this, you would constantly insist that "this *na'thal*" who has violated our religion must be killed. How can you now say that he was unjustly killed?' 'Ā'ishah replied: 'They killed the caliph after he had repented; and my second opinion is better than my first one.'

After entering Mecca, 'Ā'ishah immediately went to the mosque, set up a curtain for herself in Ḥijr Ismā'īl, and took up residence within it.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 14.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 3.

[3] *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 48.

People gathered around and she said: "Uthmān was innocently killed and I shall avenge him'.[1]

3. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf was another opponent of 'Uthmān. It was due to his political plans and his influence on 'Umar's consultative assembly that 'Uthmān was selected as the third caliph. When 'Uthmān was accused of deviation from the prophetic tradition and the conduct and precedent of the first two caliphs (i.e. the *shaykhayn*), 'Abd al-Raḥmān was blamed. In his apology, 'Abd al-Raḥmān claimed that he did not expect such a situation: 'It is therefore incumbent upon me not to talk to him any more', he said. Thus, until his death, he kept his promise – even during his final illness, 'Uthmān paid a visit to him, but 'Abd al-Raḥmān turned his face aside, and remained silent.[2]

One should mention here that two more important personalities – Ṭalḥah and Zubayr – also remained highly critical of 'Uthmān's misdemeanours.

'Uthmān's House under Siege

According to al-Balādhurī in his *Ansab al-Ashrāf*:

> In the year 34 AH / 654 CE, the opponents of the caliph's administration arrived from the three major regions of Kufa, Basra and Egypt; they gathered in the Sacred Sanctuary of Mecca to discuss 'Uthmān's conduct. They decided by a large majority to return to their respective regions, to be able to discuss the matter with the other personalities of the opposition against the caliphate. The following year they would gather in Medina to take a clear, definitive decision. But meanwhile, they decided to leave the caliph to govern hoping that he might return to the normative principles; if he did not, then he would be removed from the caliphate.
>
> The following year (35 AH / 656 CE), various groups of the opposition including Mālik al-Ashtar, with one thousand men from Kufa, Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah al-'Abdi, with one hundred and fifty men from Basra, and Kinānah ibn Bushr al-Sakkūnī al-Tajībī, together with 'Amr Budayl

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 477.

[2] *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 5, p. 48.

> al-Khuzā'ī, co-leading four hundred people from Egypt, entered Medina where a large number of the Migrants and the Helpers joined them.[1]

As stated by al-Mas'ūdī:

> 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, who had fallen into disfavour with the caliph, were supported respectively by the clans of Zuhrah, Makhzūm, and Taym. The aforementioned groups in addition to others laid siege to the house of 'Uthmān. The Egyptian group sent a letter to the caliph, stating: 'And then, "*God does not change the condition of a people unless they change themselves*" (11:11). For the sake of God do not forget the beatific life of the hereafter! We swear by God that our anger is for God and our pleasure is for God. We shall not abandon our swords until you repent for your deeds. This is our word and deed.'[2]

The Caliph's Written Undertaking

The siege was too serious to ignore. So, the caliph tried to break the siege. But he was not aware of the depth of the revolt and could not distinguish between the respectable and disrespectable. The caliph was in urgent need of mediation. He appointed 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah to try and quell the crisis. When the two men went out, the rebels protested. The rebels called Mughīrah and 'Amr 'libertine' and 'enemy of God', respectively. Meanwhile the son of 'Umar reminded the caliph of the Imam's personality and influence. He told the caliph that the Imam was the only person who could calm down the rebels. Accordingly, the Imam was requested to invite them to act in accordance with the Book of God and the prophetic tradition. The Imam agreed, but on condition that the caliph would implement the articles of a proposed peace treaty. Therefore, the Imam wrote an agreement and promised, on behalf of 'Uthmān, that the caliph would act in accordance with the Book of God and the prophetic tradition. The siege ended and the people accepted the Imam's words. Then, following after the Imam, they went to 'Uthmān's palace and severely reproached him. Consequently, 'Uthmān provided a written undertaking, parts of which are as follows: 'This is a letter from the servant of God, 'Uthmān, the Commander of the Faithful, to those criticising him. I promise to act in accordance with the Book of God and the prophetic tradition, to be generous towards the needy and the weak, to give asylum to those crying for mercy; I promise the return of the exiled, and I undertake to support the Muslim army's advance...'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the patron of the believers. 'Uthmān is charged to act in keeping this written undertaking.'

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[1] *Ghadīr*, vol. 9, p. 168.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab* (Beirut, 1970), vol. 3, p. 88.

A number of people, including Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, Zayd ibn Thābit, Sahl ibn Ḥunayf, and Abū Ayyūb, signed the letter as witnesses. This written undertaking was officially promulgated at this time, and the leaders of each group of opponents took a copy of it with themselves. Thus the siege around the house of the caliph was lifted.[1]

After this event, the Imam recommended that 'Uthmān hold due discourse with the malcontents to try and re-establish and strengthen the ties of their allegiance to the caliphate. The Imam reminded him of the widespread disturbances destabilising the Islamic territories, and warned him of possible revolts in the future. 'Uthmān was fully aware that the Imam was right and that he had nothing but good and sincere intentions towards him, so he followed his advice and went out to express his regret, and to ask forgiveness from the people. The Imam indeed made a great contribution to safeguarding unity and the status of the caliphate. If 'Uthmān had completely acted in accordance with the Imam's wise advice and instructions, he would not have been assassinated by the rebels. Alas, he was not sufficiently strong-minded and decisive, and was, moreover, encircled with incompetent advisers such as Marwān ibn Ḥakam, who had stolen the prudence and intelligence of 'Uthmān. Thus, under the influence and pressure of Marwān, the caliph again went astray, and tried to represent his meeting with his Egyptian critics in a manner altogether different from what had taken place. He said they had come to Medina to investigate the authenticity of the reports circulating in Egypt and when they realised that the reports were unfounded they returned to their homeland. When 'Uthmān uttered these words, waves of opposition were again raised and people shouted: 'Fear God, 'Uthmān, and repent!' The reaction of the people was so strong that 'Uthmān immediately raised his hands to heaven and prayed: 'O Lord! I am the first of those who return to you!'[1]

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[1] *Ansāb*, vol. 5, p. 62.

The Death Sentence against the Leading Figures of the Opposition

The riot, which was precipitated mainly by the malcontents from Egypt, tapered off, and they left Medina shortly after this event for their homes. However, on the road back to Egypt, at a place named Aylah, they saw 'Uthmān's servant and guessed that he was taking some message from the caliph for the governor of Egypt, 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sarḥ. They seized him and looked for a written message from 'Uthmān to 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sarḥ. Finally they found a letter hidden in his leather drinking bottle. In that letter the caliph instructed the governor of Egypt to execute 'Amr ibn Badīl and to cut off the hands of Kinānah, 'Urwah, and Abū 'Udays and then to execute them by hanging. After reading the letter, the Egyptians returned to Medina and went to see the Imam. He in turn went to 'Uthmān's house and showed the letter to him. 'Uthmān knew his scribe's handwriting as well as his own seal but swore by God that he never issued such orders. The evidence indicates that the caliph was truly unaware of the letter; it is also notable that at that time the seal of the caliphate was with Marwān ibn Ḥakam, because the previous keeper of the seal, had been dispatched to Basra.[2]

The Egyptians laid siege to the caliph's house while demanding to see and speak to him. When they did meet, 'Uthmān swore by God that he had never issued such orders. The representative of the opponents said in response that if 'Uthmān were really unaware that the letter had been written in his name, he was incompetent and thus incapable of managing the caliphate and should, therefore, resign. But 'Uthmān, referring to his responsibility before God, refused to resign. The Egyptians' boldness greatly annoyed the Umayyads. They tried to set forth misleading and untrue reasons for the grievances, claiming that the disturbances arose as a result of the Imam's support for the Egyptians, and they were emboldened by him to manifest such excessive boldness. The Imam strongly refuted these allegations, and said that whereas before he had been able to calm the Egyptians down, this time he would not succeed, and that it would be best for him to withdraw. The Imam then said: 'O God! You know that I am innocent of what they attribute to me. If, meanwhile, 'Uthmān's blood is shed, I have no responsibility at all.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* (A'lami edition), vol. 3, p. 385.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 344.

All the evidence indicates that the letter was written by Marwān himself or at the latter's instructions. Consequently, the Egyptians asked the caliph to dismiss Marwān, but 'Uthmān refused. Accordingly, the opponents mounted a strong siege around the caliph's house and cut the water supply. 'Uthmān asked his agents to inform the Imam who later sent three large leather-bottles through his Hāshimite clansmen. It is said that although the Hāshimite bearers of water were wounded, they succeeded in entering 'Uthmān's house.

The Siege and the Caliph's Letters

During the siege, 'Uthmān sent a letter to Mu'āwiyah to inform him that the inhabitants of Medina had broken their pledge of allegiance to him. He also requested a dispatch of a detachment of soldiers to Medina. But Mu'āwiyah replied that he could never oppose the Messenger's companions! 'Uthmān also sent letters to personalities such as Yazīd ibn Asad al-Bajalī, in Syria, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir, in Basra, as well as to the pilgrims of the hajj who in that year were under the supervision of Ibn 'Abbās. None of these letters, however, had any impact; just a few friends of the caliph rushed to Medina and tried to save him, but upon arrival were told that he had already been killed.

Marwān's Misconduct Accelerated 'Uthmān's Murder

The rebels tried repeatedly to cut the water supply to the caliph's house so as to expedite the surrender of the caliph and his entourage. It was in fact, however, Marwān who ignited the actual fighting by killing one of the rebels, a man named 'Urwah al-Laythī. The rebels then attacked the caliph's house and killed three of the caliph's associates, namely, 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Awf, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān. The rebels managed to enter the interior of the caliph's house via the house of 'Amr ibn Ḥazm al-Anṣārī, which was adjacent to the caliph's house, and they proceeded to kill him. 'Uthmān's slave, a man named Nāqil, was killed by Mālik al-Ashtar and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd. Other guards were also defeated and escaped. They sought shelter in the house of Umm Ḥabībah, daughter of Abū Sufyān, and also one of the wives of the Prophet. It was due to their seeking shelter in the house (*dār*) of the Prophet's wife that the day of this event later became known as Yawm al-Dār. The caliph apparently was killed by Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, Kinānah ibn Bishr al-Taḥbībī, Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān al-Murādī, ʿAmr ibn Ḥamiq, and ʿUmayr ibn Ṣābī. During the final assault, ʿUthmān's wife, Nā'ilah, threw herself on her husband's body to protect him, and to try and stop him from being beheaded by the rebels; she succeeded in this, but her two fingers were cut off. However, a few minutes later, the caliph died as a result of the wounds he had received from the swords of the rebels.

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Allegiance to ʿAlī after the Assassination of ʿUthmān

The unjust conduct of the third caliph towards some of the senior companions of the Prophet, his appointment of some unsuitable Umayyad governors, and the misappropriation of public funds by his governors finally led a group of outraged Iraqi and Egyptian rebels to assassinate him on 18 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 / 17 June 656. After this event a number of ʿUthmān's major companions and agents fled to Mecca.[1]

The Muslims of Medina and the surrounding areas became transfixed by the news of the assassination. Everyone, especially those companions like Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, and Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ who were among the major candidates for the caliphate, were thinking of the future caliph. The revolutionaries were aware that after ʿUthmān's assassination chaos might prevail, so they decided to immediately nominate the next caliph, who could be no one but ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who, during the twenty-five years of the rules of the previous caliphs, had been firmly attached to the essential teachings of Islam and the prophetic tradition. Unfortunately, many other figures like Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, were, to some degree or another, infected with worldly concerns and accumulation of wealth and property around the Islamic territories. They were thus almost cut off from the prophetic tradition and even from the conduct established by the first two caliphs.

When the revolutionaries had laid siege to the house of the third caliph, ʿAlī was the most trusted mediator between them and the caliph, ʿUthmān. He was sincerely trying to control the situation and create peace between the rebels and the caliphal apparatus. However, most of the same factors – except the factor of age – which had deprived 'Alī of the caliphate in Saqīfah, were still persisting. But the powerful determination of the revolutionaries and the consensus of opinion put an end to these factors and prevented the people from selecting an ordinary senior companion as the fourth caliph.

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* (Būlāq edition), vol. 5, p. 156.

Thus, if 'Uthmān's death had occurred in a natural manner, the influential figures of the companions in Medina would have forced him to designate a successor – just as Abū Bakr had designated 'Umar, or would have arranged a *shūrā* for appointing a senior companion seeking to ensure that someone with a political orientation similar to that of 'Uthmān, and not the Imam, would succeed as caliph.

They knew well that 'Alī's equitable and fair manner of rule would prevent them from accumulating wealth as well as from usurping key governmental posts. Therefore, when 'Alī withheld from Ṭalḥah and Zubayr any major role in the caliphate, they immediately broke their allegiance and prepared to fight him; hence the Battle of Jamal took place, to which we will turn to below.

The fundamental factors which deprived 'Alī of the caliphate at Saqīfah may be summarised as follows:

1. The fact that, during the holy wars of the Prophet against the disbelievers, a number of the pagan relatives of the companions had been killed by 'Alī.
2. The inveterate animosity between the Banū Hāshim and other clans such as the Umayyads.
3. 'Alī's strict adherence to the divine law.

Another important factor, not less effective, which may be added to the above, was 'Ā'ishah's opposition to 'Alī who, being the respected wife of the Prophet and a transmitter of a large number of prophetic hadiths, had acquired an extremely important political stature in the Islamic world. During the rule of 'Uthmān, often 'Ā'ishah incited people to remove him, reiterating that 'The Prophet's garment is still not worn out while his tradition has been altered and practically forgotten'.[1] The major reasons for 'Ā'ishah's opposition to 'Alī may be given as follows:

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[1] Abū al-Fidā, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1, p. 172.

1. The opinion shared by ʿAlī and his companions during the event of the *ʿifk*', that is, the accusations of infidelity made against ʿĀ'ishah.
2. Fāṭimah, the Prophet's daughter, had a number of children, while ʿĀ'ishah had none.
3. ʿĀ'ishah felt that ʿAlī was displeased with the caliphate of her father, Abū Bakr, and the latter's conduct in regard to Fadak.

In addition, Ṭalḥah, from the tribe of Taym, was ʿĀ'ishah's cousin and Zubayr was her brother-in-law, being the husband of Asmā', ʿĀ'ishah's sister; and both were ready to assume the caliphate. There is a vivid testimony of ʿĀ'ishah's disapproval of ʿAlī's caliphate: a dialogue which took place on her return from Mecca to Medina in a place called Sarf. When ʿĀ'ishah learned about ʿUthmān's assassination, as well as the allegiance of the companions to ʿAlī, she became disturbed and decided to return to Mecca. She repeatedly declared that she would avenge ʿUthmān's blood, and that the latter was innocently killed. The person who had conveyed the news to ʿĀ'ishah dared to ask: 'You are the first one to change your words. Before this, you would constantly insist that ʿUthmān had become a *kāfir*, and was to be killed; and now you say that he was killed unjustly?' ʿĀ'ishah replied: 'After making him repent, they killed him; and my second opinion is better than the first one'.[1]

Allegiance of the Revolutionaries to ʿAlī

The surge in destructive currents seemed set to deprive the Imam of the caliphate for a fourth time, but the powerful will of the revolutionaries, together with the general underlying consensus, neutralised these currents. The companions of the Prophet came to the Imam's home en masse and affirmed that he was the most appropriate person to be caliph.[2] As stated by Abū Mikhnaf in his *Jamal*:

> After the assassination of ʿUthmān a large number of Muslims assembled in the Prophet's mosque of Medina. The mosque became absolutely full. The aim of this gathering was to determine who was to be caliph. A number of the distinguished companions of the Prophet among both the Migrants and the Helpers, like ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, Abū al-Haytham

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* (Būlāq edition), vol. 5, p. 173.

[2] Ibid., p. 152.

> ibn Tayhān, Rifāʿah ibn Rāfiʿ, Mālik ibn ʿAjlān, and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī and many others, invited people to swear allegiance to ʿAlī. ʿAmmār spoke about ʿAlī more than anyone else, saying 'You are fully aware of the previous caliph's conduct. We should not go the same way, so before it is too late, we must make a swift decision. You are all fully aware of ʿAlī's sublime virtues and his precedence in this affair, as regards his unrivalled contribution [to the spread of Islam]...' All agreed with ʿAmmār, and said that they are most pleased with the caliphate of ʿAlī. Then they made haste to ʿAlī's house.[1]

ʿAlī himself described the scene as follows: 'Like loose camels leaping on each other for drinking water, the crowd pounced upon me. My apprehension was either they want to kill me or some want to kill others...'[2]

In the Shiqshiqiyyah Sermon, ʿAlī continues his description of the scene: 'People advanced towards me from every corner, with such intensity that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were nearly trampled over, and my garment was rent asunder; like a flock of sheep they encircled me until I accepted their allegiance'.[3]

However, initially the Imam advised them to take him as their adviser rather than as leader. They refused and said: 'We shall not leave you until you accept our allegiance'. He said: 'Then the ceremony of swearing allegiance must take place in the mosque. Such oath of allegiance can not be secretive. It must be done in the open, with the approval of the majority of the Muslims.' The Imam led the way towards the mosque. The Migrants, the Helpers, and later many other groups, joined to swear allegiance to the new caliph. First in line were Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, and then one by one they all pledged allegiance. The overwhelming majority, except a few individuals, recognised ʿAlī as the caliph.[4] This historical event took place on 25 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 / 24 June 656.[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 8.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 53.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 3.

[4] They were: Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, Usāmah ibn Zayd, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, Kaʿb ibn Mālik, and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām. According to al-Ṭabarī (*Taʾrīkh*, vol. 5, p. 153), they were among the adherents of ʿUthmān. According to some sources, at first they also pledged allegiance to ʿAlī, but later took part in the Battle of Jamal against ʿAlī.

The Most Natural Oath of Allegiance

In the history of the Islamic caliphate no leader was given so general a consensus as that given to Imam 'Alī. He alone was spontaneously elected through the consensus of the Prophet's companions, encompassing not only the Helpers and the Migrants, but also the most erudite among those of knowledge, and the *qurrā'*, the 'reciters' of the Qur'an. He alone acquired caliphate through a spontaneous outpouring of unanimous support. He himself described the event as follows: 'Sandals were untied, cloaks fell from shoulders, the weak were trampled, yet the joy of the people was such that young and old rushed forth to offer their allegiance. The children were overjoyed, and girls pushed aside their veils to see better what was happening.'[2]

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar refused to swear allegiance to 'Alī, since he was fully aware that for 'Alī, the caliphate was by no means the final goal, but only the means to an end, an apparatus for implementing justice. On 26 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 / 25 June 656, 'Abd Allāh came to the Imam and tried to convince him to resign; he said: 'It is better to delegate the selection of the caliph to a consultative assembly (*shūrā*), because some people are unpleasant'. At this point the Imam became angry and said: 'Woe to you! I did not ask them to pledge allegiance to me. Did not you observe the mass movement of the people? Rise and leave, you ignorant man!' 'Abd Allāh, having found the atmosphere of Medina uncongenial, left the city for Mecca, because he was aware that the Imam would always hold the Sacred Sanctuary in respect.[3]

As stated in most of the historical sources, pledging allegiance to 'Alī occurred on the basis of a spontaneous public approval. No evidence of forced allegiance was reported and the people, although with different intentions, freely swore allegiance to him. Even Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, assuming some benefit or doing so out of fear, pledged their allegiance, as did other prominent figures among both the Helpers and the Migrants. Al-Ṭabarī transmitted a number of narratives which describe the oath of allegiance made by Ṭalḥah and Zubayr in different ways; however, those narratives which affirmed that these two men had freely pledged allegiance to the Imam are in the majority, and this fact supports the opinion of al-Ṭabarī himself.[1] Also, the Imam's remarks in this regard unveil the truth. But when Ṭalḥah and Zubayr broke their pledge, a rumour was spread to the effect that the two men had been forced to swear allegiance. In response, the Imam said: 'Zubayr thinks that with his hand he gave allegiance not with his heart; but this is not true; he confessed his allegiance and claimed kinship with me. Either he must produce attestation to his claims (of having been forced to pledge allegiance) or else reinstate his pledge.'[2]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 8–9.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 224.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 10.

The Imam continued his debates with Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and further lifted the veil from the truth: 'By God, I had no desire for the caliphate, nor did I have any cunning goal to attain political power. Rather, it was you people who called upon me to assume this responsibility, and who imposed it upon me.'[3]

Fabricators of History

Sayf ibn 'Umar was one of the fabricators who, through forging a number of false narrations, tried to twist the historical record. He stated that, having been frightened by Mālik's sword, Ṭalḥah and Zubayr swore allegiance to 'Alī.[4] This account in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* clearly contradicts the previous report in the same work, and is also at odds with 'Alī's utterances, as well as his fair and equitable manner of rule. He left at peace those few individuals who had refused to swear allegiance to him, and did not permit anyone to harass or injure them. When it was suggested to the Imam that he send someone to these people to try and secure their allegiance, he refused and said: 'I have no need for their pledge of allegiance'.[5]

Fortunately, al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* is *musnad*, that is, it is supported by the chains of transmission of each reports, and thus enables us to investigate the reliability and truthfulness of the transmitters, and so enables us to ascertain those which are forged or unreliable. The ostensible hero involved in these reports, which are mostly to the benefit of the first three caliphs and against the household of the Prophet, is Sayf ibn 'Umar, of whom Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī has written in his *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*: 'He is a forger. His narratives are unreliable and his hadiths are rejected by the sound scholars. He is also accused of heresy.'[1]

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[1] See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* (Būlāq edition), pp. 152–153, quoting the narrative through three different chains of transmission.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 7.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 200.

[4] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 157.

[5] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 9.

Regrettably, after al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, the forged reports of this individual were widely disseminated, being cited in many historical works, such as Ibn 'Asākir's *Ta'rīkh*, Ibn Athīr's *Kāmil*, Ibn Kathīr's *Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* as well as Ibn Khaldūn's *Ta'rīkh*. All of them followed al-Ṭabarī without undertaking the necessary research into the sources of his citation, assuming that whatever he cited must be true.

The Roots of Conflict and Rebellion

After the thirteen-year rule of 'Uthmān, the environment within which the Imam assumed power was one enriched by the fruits of the conquests of the Muslims in diverse lands. He thus inherited the bulging treasury of 'Uthmān's government. This presented no problem for the Imam, the only complex question was how to ensure the fair distribution of such wealth among the Muslims. From the last days of the rule of the second caliph, and throughout the rule of the third, deviation from the prophetic tradition and from the conduct of the first caliph had set in, and a powerful group of figures connected to the family of the caliph, distributed the spoils of war and state-owned property among themselves as if it were their private property. As noted above, it was this state of affairs that resulted in such intense and ever-increasing public discontent.

During the Prophet's lifetime, as well as in the period of the first caliph until 15 AH / 636 CE or 20 AH / 641 CE,[2] the spoils of war and other assets were instantly distributed on an equitable basis to all the Muslims, and nothing was stored up. The second caliph, however, founded the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) and salaries of people were bestowed according to certain scales and standards. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd provided the following list of salaries during the rule of 'Umar:

1. 'Abbās, the Prophet's uncle, 12,000 annually;

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[1] *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 4, p. 296.

[2] The first date is given in Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 2, p. 194. The second date is given in al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (1384/1964), vol. 2, p. 143.

2. each of the Messenger's wives, 10,000 (2,000 extra for 'Ā'ishah);
3. the Migrants who fought at the Battle of Badr, 5,000, and for the Helpers who fought at Badr, 4,000;
4. those companions who had embraced Islam between the Battle of Uḥud and before the Peace of Ḥudaybiyyah, 4,000;
5. those who had converted after the Peace of Ḥudaybiyyah, 3,000;
6. those who fought in the wars of conquest after the Prophet's passing away, 2,500, 2,000, or between 200 and 1,500, according to their rank.[1]

'Umar claimed that his goal was to attract the Arab aristocracy to Islam by means of this system. However, during the last year of his life, 'Umar said that were he to be given a longer life, he would distribute the wealth according to the Messenger's system of equal distribution.

This act of 'Umar laid the foundation for the future stratification of society by establishing class divisions in Islam; it was to sow the seeds of the vast discrepancy of wealth and intense class antagonisms which characterised the caliphate of his successor.[2]

This was the state of affairs which the Imam inherited as caliph. One of his aims was to re-establish the Prophet's system of equitable distribution of wealth, and to eradicate the class distinctions which had emerged. Needless to say, in the pursuit of this aim, he was bound to confront great obstacles and bitter opponents; for an equal distribution of wealth and property posed a great threat to the assets of a certain group of individuals.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Egypt edition), vol. 3, p. 154.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 143.

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Opposition to Imam ʿAlī

The divisions and antagonisms which prevailed within Muslim society during and after the Imam's assumption of the caliphate were unprecedented, nothing like these disturbances had occurred during the rule of the first three caliphs. It is true that the selection of the first caliph took place amid much discord, and objections were raised by those who believed that the caliph should be chosen by divine decree. But it did not take long for the situation to return to normal, because, out of concern for the higher interests of the welfare and peace of Muslim society, this party sacrificed their rights and refrained from opposing the caliphate politically.

The processes of selection of the second and the third caliphs were also not devoid of controversy, but the storms soon abated, and the caliphs assumed the reins of power. But after the selection of Imam ʿAlī, a group of opponents raised objections and generated a major schism within Islamic society. Their opposition was rooted in long-standing personal animosities: in fact, a number of the pagan relatives of the companions had been killed by ʿAlī during the battles of the Prophet against the disbelievers. Once, during the days of allegiance, Walīd ibn ʿUtbah said to ʿAlī: 'In the day of [the Battle of] Badr, my father was killed by your sword. You stopped supporting my brother, ʿUthmān; and the father of Saʿīd ibn ʿĀṣ was also killed by your sword; [in addition] you humiliated Marwān in front of ʿUthmān, calling him empty-headed...'

But, in truth, the main reasons which incited the opponents to seek excuses for their opposition were (a) ʿAlī's removal of all unfairness in the mode of distribution of public funds (*bayt al-māl*); and (b) dismissal of the unworthy governors appointed by the third caliph.

These acts led a number of worldly and ambitious people to rise against the caliphate of ʿAlī, in order to secure their unjustly accumulated wealth, wealth which might now be confiscated by the state.

Imam ʿAlī was firmly resolved to revive the prophetic norm in an unconditional manner, in order that the state of affairs in the political and social domain revert to that which prevailed in the prophetic period. But, regretfully, the widespread and deep-rooted piety and virtue which characterised the Muslims during the Prophet's lifetime had been greatly eroded, and public morals and ideals were at a much lower level. Instead, unjust discrimination had penetrated deep into Muslim society and the reins of administration and power were in hands of incompetent and prejudiced individuals.

As will be recalled from what was mentioned earlier, during the discussions of the *shūrā* of six persons set up by ʿUmar, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf – a wealthy man from the Quraysh – offered the caliphate to ʿAlī, on the condition that he would act in accordance with the Book of God, the prophetic tradition, and the precedent established by the first two caliphs. Imam ʿAlī, however, did not accept the third condition, and said: 'I shall act in accordance with the Book of God, the prophetic tradition, and my own reasoning (*ijtihād*), but not the precedent of the first two caliphs'. His uncompromising stance deprived him of the leadership for twelve years. But now, the time had arrived for the Imam to take up the reins of power, and to revive the prophetic system of equitable distribution of pusblic funds. As stated above, the Prophet would not store up any wealth; rather, he would equally distribute it without discrimination between Arab or non-Arab, white or black.

ʿAlī's Sermon Prior to Distributing Public Funds

Before dividing up the wealth contained in the public treasury, the Imam declared:

> O people! No one is born into slavery; everyone is free. To some, God has granted abundant prosperity; anyone in distress must exercise patience, without ever thinking that by doing so, one is doing God a favour. The

> public treasury has been brought before us, and we shall distribute it equally among the white and the black.[1]

At this point, Marwān turned to Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and said: 'By these words 'Alī is implicitly referring to you: henceforth, there no distinction will be made between you and the others.'

In his *Naqḍ al-'Uthmāniyyah*, al-Iskāfī criticises al-Jāḥiẓ's work entitled *'Uthmāniyyah* and gives a more complete version of 'Alī's sermon; according to al-Iskāfī:

> On 19 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 [18 June 656], two days after the people swore allegiance to 'Alī, the latter sat on the pulpit (*minbar*) and delivered a comprehensive sermon: '...O people! I shall guide you to the luminous path of the Prophet and my commands shall be implemented in society. Act in accordance with my prescriptions and refrain from what I prohibit. O people! ['Alī then looked to the right and the left and continued] I shall never refrain from uprooting from their attachments those people who are immersed in worldly desires and luxuries, those owners of vast lands and lakes, beasts of burden, slaves and beautiful handmaids; and I will remind them of their religious obligations as prescribed by divine law. So, beware, and do not condemn me, saying that the son of Abū Ṭālib has deprived us of our rights. A person who thinks that he is superior to others simply on account of having been a companion of the Prophet must know that this is not the criterion of superiority. Superiority pertains to a person who responds positively to the call of God and His messenger and who embrace and implement the religion of Islam wholeheartedly. Thus, in the eyes of the law, all people have equal rights. All of you are servants of God, all wealth belongs to Him, and shall thus be distributed equally among you. No one has superiority over another. The public treasury soon shall be divided out equally among the Arabs and non-Arabs.'[2]

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[1] *Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 68.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 7, p. 37.

The System of Distribution of Public Funds

Imam ʿAlī ordered his own scribe, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfiʿ,[1] to pay three dinars to each of the Helpers and the Migrants.

Sahl ibn Ḥunayf al-Anṣārī objected: 'Is it fair for me to be made equal with this black man, who until yesterday was my slave?' Imam ʿAlī replied: 'In the Book of God, I cannot see any distinction between the descendants of Ishmael and those of Isaac.'

Dismissal of ʿUthmān's Governors

The most important political decision taken by the Imam was the dismissal of ʿUthmān's governors, with Muʿāwiyah at the top of the list. From the first day of his caliphate, the Imam decided to remove those governors of ʿUthmān who had usurped the assets of the state either for the sake of adding to their personal wealth or for the sake of realising certain political goals. They had also granted part of the public wealth to their own offspring, and had extravagant life-styles similar to those of the Byzantine emperors and Persian kings. The Imam had made one of his most severe objections to ʿUthmān when the latter reappointed Muʿāwiyah as governor of Syria. Often people would hear this objection raised by ʿAlī.

At the beginning of 36 AH / 656 CE, the Imam selected a number of pious and virtuous personages who were worthy of governorship, and dispatched them as governors to the various regions ruled by the Islamic state. He sent ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf to Basra, ʿAmmār ibn Shihāb to Kufa, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās to Yemen, Qays ibn Saʿd to Egypt, and Sahl ibn Ḥunayf to Syria. All, except Sahl ibn Ḥunayf, who returned midway, successfully assumed power in their respective regions.[2]

The dismissal of most of the previously appointed governors, Muʿāwiyah in particular, instantly precipitated controversy and debate. A group of short-sighted people, oblivious of the prevailing conditions and circumstances at the time, regarded the Imam's act as stemming from political weakness, manifesting a lack of foresight and acumen as regards the realities of governance. They argue that the Imam was not one to employ the arts of cunning, deception or duplicity; lying and pretension could make no inroads into his code of ethics or politics. Since retaining these governors was deemed by the Imam to be contrary to God's good pleasure, he dismissed them. He then had to face the tragic consequences of his decision in the form of bloodshed and chaos. They argue that if the Imam had not hastily dismissed the previous governors, and had instead left them in their posts until such time as his authority and power were consolidated, he could have proceeded to dismiss them without suffering any negative repercussions; he would never have had to undergo the terrible battles of Ṣiffīn, Jamal, and so on. He would have been in a better position to govern and carry out his policies successfully. Such an argument is not new; it was made from the very beginning of the Imam's rule, with various individuals putting this case to the Imam. However, he would have none of this kind of strategy.

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[1] The household of Ibn Rāfiʿ was one of the noble and distinguished Shiʿi families who had great affection for the Prophet's household. Abū Rāfiʿ himself was a companion of the Prophet and a close associate of ʿAlī.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 5, p. 161.

Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, one of the four most prominent Arab politicians of the time, heard about the Imam's decision and immediately went to his house, saying: 'It is prudent that 'Uthmān's governors be permitted to retain their positions for a year. Once they have obtained the people's allegiance to you, and once you have established your reign throughout the Islamic empire, and you are in complete control of the state, then dismiss or retain anyone you wish'.

The Imam replied: 'I swear by God that I shall never employ flattery in my religion, nor shall I give [power] to the ignoble in my [political] domain.'

Mughīrah retorted: 'If you do not accept my proposal in regard to all of the governors, then at least compromise temporarily with Mu'āwiyah. Once he has obtained the allegiance for you from the Syrians, then you can with complete confidence dismiss him at your leisure.'

The Imam said: 'I swear by God I shall never permit Mu'āwiyah to rule over people's life and property even for two days.'

Having realised he could not influence the Imam, Mughīrah left his house. Again on the following day he went to the Imam, and once he saw that the Imam's decision regarding Mu'āwiyah could not be changed, he said: 'It is not appropriate for you, given your sublime rank, to allow deceit and cunning to enter into your life. The sooner you dismiss Muʿāwiyah the better.'

Ibn ʿAbbās reports: 'I told ʿAlī: "Mughīrah's first proposal, to retain Muʿāwiyah, was purely for your benefit; while his second proposal was the very opposite. He was aiming at another goal. It is prudent for you to retain Muʿāwiyah; once he has sworn allegiance and has obtained the allegiance of the Syrians for you, I shall myself expel him from Syria!"' But the Imam again refused to accept this suggestion.[1]

At this point, it is important to examine the Imam's decision to dismiss the previous governors, and in particular, Muʿāwiyah; and to do so from the point of view of political principles, social conditions, the general interests of the Muslims and of Islam, and of the Imam's own personal interests. Leaving aside the fact that confirming unrighteous governors in their positions violates the principle of upholding the welfare of the Muslims and of Islam in general, one might ask: from a purely political point of view, and bearing in mind the practical needs of governance, would the best course of action have been to retain the existing governors and confirm them in their positions? Or is it the case that here the paths of piety and politics converge, such that anyone else in the Imam's place would have had no option other than to remove the previously appointed governors? If Muʿāwiyah had become caliph after ʿUthmān, would he also have had no choice but to remove those governors appointed by his predecessor?

The Reason for the Speed of Muʿāwiyah's Dismissal

Needless to say, confirming a person like Muʿāwiyah as the governor of Syria was totally against the Imam's well-known principles of piety and righteousness. However, the question is this: would the confirmation of such persons have been in accordance with the dictates of political sagacity and farsightedness in respect of governance? If an impious caliph were in the position of the Imam, and he had to deal with the same set of governors as those which the Imam had to deal with, would such a caliph had allowed these governors to remain in place and confirm their authority? Or is it the case that the principles of political sagacity, farsightedness, and also the personal interests of the Imam (not to mention the lofty principles of Islam) required the caliph to remove all such unworthy governors, and to ensure that such sensitive positions of authority in Islam be filled by individuals trusted and approved by the Muslims and the revolutionaries?

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[1] Ibid., p. 160.

Some analysts confirm the first point of view, arguing that it was only on the basis of his pious principles that the Imam dismissed the unworthy governors appointed by ʿUthmān, and that it would have been in the Imam's personal interests if he had left Muʿāwiyah alone for a while and compromised with him, so as to avoid the bloodshed that ensued at Ṣiffīn and Nahrawān, among other battles. But there are also writers, such as the late Egyptian scholar ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, the author of ʿAbqariyyat al-Imām ʿAlī, as well as Ḥasan Ṣadr, who, on the basis of firm evidence, insist that the second point of view is correct. They demonstrate, with sound logical arguments, that it was not just the Imam's piety that dictated this course of action, but also political farsightedness: if the Imam had taken a different stance, he would have faced far greater problems. By removing Muʿāwiyah and the other governors sharing his tendencies, the Imam was removing sources of corruption which would have poisoned the caliphal apparatus and also the entire body politic of the *ummah*, resulting in far greater disturbances and difficulties in the long term.

It is, however, true that after the dismissal of Muʿāwiyah, the Imam was confronted by waves of opposition from the Syrians. But if he had not removed Muʿāwiyah, he would have had to face not just these opponents, but also those oppressed revolutionaries who had brought the Imam to power. The opposition of these groups would have created ever-escalating disturbances and disorder.

It is necessary at this point to deepen our appreciation of the basis of this argument.

1. The Imam was selected as caliph on the basis of the support of a large number of oppressed revolutionaries who had suffered grievously at the hands of the governors appointed by the third caliph. This group had gathered at Medina and killed ʿUthmān. The force and fury of this mass of revolutionaries even silenced figures like Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and caused them to accept the caliphate of the Imam. The revolutionaries had turned to the Imam, requesting him to take up the caliphate, in order to put an end to the regime in which self-serving governors were working corruption throughout

the lands of Islam. Alongside the revolutionaries there were a number of righteous companions of the Prophet who were also dissatisfied with the conduct of the third caliph's administration, but had remained silent for the sake of peace, and in the interests of the Islamic state. After the assassination of ʿUthmān, they also pledged allegiance to the Imam. In such circumstances, any kind of compromise with Muʿāwiyah – given the fact that his dictatorship and corruption were hidden from none – would be regarded as nothing short of collaboration with this perpetrator of injustice. It would have been seen as a betrayal of the very goals and principles held as sacrosanct by the revolutionaries and the pious companions, those principles for the sake of which the Imam was invited to be caliph. Confirming Muʿāwiyah and his fellow governors in their positions would have been seen by this group as an expression of political machination and pure hypocrisy.

In the measure, Muʿāwiyah would have benefited from this compromise to rectify his bad image, and vindicate his authority, in that same measure the Imam's integrity and stature as an uncompromising champion of justice would have been diminished in the eyes of all righteous Muslims. Nothing other than the removal of such governors as Muʿāwiyah would have quelled the ferocious anger of the revolutionaries in their quest for justice. Had the Imam compromised with Muʿāwiyah, then, from the very outset of his caliphate, he would have lost the overwhelming majority of his own supporters, whose rebellious spirit would have once again been incited – this time, against himself and his authority. Only those few supporters who were in total accord with the Imam, whatever he decided, would have remained loyal to him. Thus, there would have been factionalism and a fatal split at the very heart of the Islamic state in Medina; the masses would have taken sides with different groups instead of rallying behind the Imam, and the lamp of the Imam's government would have been extinguished in those early days of his caliphate.

2. Even if all of the companions and radicals among the supporters of the Imam had accepted the need for a temporary compromise with Muʿāwiyah, and stood firmly behind the Imam, one has to ask the question: what would Muʿāwiyah's reaction have been to any compromise proposed by the Imam? Would he have accepted the Imam's invitation to remain in power and to secure for the

> Imam the pledge of the Syrians, winning them over for the newly established caliphate? It is clear that Mu'āwiyah, an astute and wily politician, would have realised that such a compromise could only be temporary, and that, once the Imam had consolidated his authority throughout the lands of Islam, he would not hesitate to remove Mu'āwiyah and put an end to his self-serving regime.

Mu'āwiyah's cunning plots and careful strategic thinking were famed. He, more than anyone else, knew the Imam's character, and was acutely aware that the Imam would never permit the continuation of the kind of self-serving policies and misappropriation of funds which characterised Mu'āwiyah's mode of governance. He would thus have seen through any conciliatory gestures by the Imam, knowing that they could only be temporary measures, calculated to buy time. The Imam would then be able to remove Mu'āwiyah with impunity, employing the full force of the enhanced power which would later be at his disposal, and appoint his own trusted officers to the governorship of Syria.

It is, therefore, evident that Mu'āwiyah would never have been able to accept any invitation to remain as governor and obtain the allegiance of the Syrians for the Imam. Instead, he would have exploited this invitation – as he exploited the shirt of 'Uthmān – to bolster his own authority among the Syrians; and he would have pointed to this invitation as evidence supporting his allegation of the Imam's responsibility for the murder of 'Uthmān.

If Ibn 'Abbās had been able to devise the strategy of a temporary compromise with Mu'āwiyah, to buy time until the Imam's power was more firmly established, then Mu'āwiyah, surely, could also have thought of it. He could easily have seen through such a compromise, and thus would never have accepted the Imam's invitation. Instead he would have resorted to altogether different strategies of resistance.

An Opportunity not to be Missed

The greatest weapon available to Mu'āwiyah was the blood of 'Uthmān. If he did not claim to be avenging the blood of 'Uthmān in the first few days following the killing, he would never be able to do so later.

He commenced his strategy by taking 'Uthmān's blood-stained shirt, together with two fingers of his wife, Nā'ilah, which were severed while defending her husband, and hanging them from the top of the pulpit of the congregational mosque of Damascus. Then he incited people to rise and avenge the blood of ʿUthmān, calling out for retribution against the killers, whose action, Muʿāwiyah claimed, was the culmination of a protest movement initiated by ʿAlī. If Muʿāwiyah had pledged his allegiance to the Imam in those first days of the new caliphate, then he would have forfeited a major weapon against the Imam: henceforth, he would never have been able to accuse the Imam of having killed ʿUthmān, and of contrasting the innocence of ʿUthmān with the guilt of ʿAlī. Thus, the assassination of ʿUthmān provided an historic pretext for Muʿāwiyah, his major weapon in the struggle to legitimise his rule and to delegitimise that of the Imam. The use of this pretext precluded altogether Muʿāwiyah's acceptance of any invitation from the Imam to compromise; for the moment Muʿāwiyah pledged allegiance to the Imam and recognised his authority, his claim to be avenging the blood of ʿUthmān would have been stained, and he would have lost a golden opportunity.

Foundation for Hereditary Rule

From many years before the Imam's rise to the caliphate, Muʿāwiyah had begun to prepare the ground for establishing hereditary rule through widespread propaganda, bribery, and favouritism; through exiling those of his subjects who would not tolerate his rule; and through attracting to himself the attention and support of the caliph of the time. He was vigilantly awaiting the death or assassination of ʿUthmān so as to be able to carry out his long awaited ambition.

Even when ʿUthmān's house was under siege, Muʿāwiyah sent no help to the caliph, hoping instead that his demise might be hastened, so that Muʿāwiyah might achieve his goal all the more quickly. Such a person could never have accepted any invitation from the Imam, and would definitely have manipulated such an invitation and used it for the sake of his own benefit and to the detriment of the Imam's cause. The historical sources provide clear evidence that the third caliph requested assistance from Muʿāwiyah, but despite the fact that Muʿāwiyah was fully aware of the circumstances, he refused to send any help to the besieged caliph. In one of his letters to Muʿāwiyah, the Imam writes: 'You helped ʿUthmān only at a time when it was to your advantage to do so. Yet you treated him with contempt at a time when any help given to him would only have been to his advantage.'[1]

In another letter to Muʿāwiyah the Imam wrote: 'I swear by God that none but yourself killed your cousin.'[2]

In his letter to Muʿāwiyah, Ibn ʿAbbās wrote: 'I swear by God that you were anxiously awaiting ʿUthmān's death, hoping for his demise, thus preventing people from helping him. You received ʿUthmān's letter, requesting your help and support, but you ignored it, even though you were fully aware that the people besieging him would not rest until he were killed. ʿUthmān was assassinated and that is what you wanted. If ʿUthmān were indeed innocently killed, you were the greatest of his oppressors.'[3]

In the light of these factors and arguments, is it conceivable that such a person as Muʿāwiyah – whose ambition was so intense that he was eagerly awaiting the death or assassination of the caliph – would accept an invitation from Imam ʿAlī, and thereby squander the golden opportunity that had opened up for him at that time?

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah,* Letter 37.

[2] *ʿIqd al-Farīd,* vol. 2, p. 223.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah,* vol. 4, p. 58.

5

Muʿāwiyah's Long-Cherished Aspiration for the Caliphate

The previous arguments clearly demonstrated that removing such figures as Muʿāwiyah from positions of authority was not only necessitated by piety and rectitude, but that this removal was also required by foresight, statesmanship, prudence, and damage reduction. Those arguments further demonstrated that the course of action that was adopted by Imam ʿAlī was the most appropriate course that could be taken by a sagacious statesman, and that putting up with Muʿāwiyah would yield nothing but increased loss.

Ibn ʿAbbās suggested that the Imam should put up with his implacable enemy, a suggestion which was far from prudent. And the well-known Arab politician, Mughīrah ibn Shuʿbah, recommended that the Imam should not dismiss Muʿāwiyah from his position, but the next day he expressed a contrary view, asserting that his removal from office was an expedient act. However, it cannot be known which of his suggestions was inspired by sincerity.

Some simple-minded individuals hold the view that retaining Muʿāwiyah in his position was in the interest of Imam ʿAlī, but that because the Imam was among those few men for whom adherence to truth took priority over everything else, he issued the order of removing Muʿāwiyah from office without taking into consideration the political and military outcome of his decision. They are not aware of Muʿāwiyah's ambitions and his long-cherished aspiration for the caliphate, about his activities under the third caliph, about his correspondence after the murder of 'Uthmān and before receiving the Imam's order on his dismissal, and such like. The fact of the matter is that these individuals have studied the issue superficially.

We will now refer to some historical reasons for this argument, the reasons which testify to the fact that Mu'āwiyah was pursuing no objective but to establish a seemingly Islamic empire, and that even if the Imam had appointed him governor of Syria, he not only would never have contented himself with that post, but that he would have abused his power and position as well.

1. Following the caliph's assassination, Nu'mān ibn Bashīr, carrying a letter from 'Uthmān's wife as well as 'Uthmān's bloody shirt, went to Syria and presented a report on the existing conditions in Medina. Mu'āwiyah mounted the pulpit, raised 'Uthmān's shirt, showing it to the crowd of people, and urged them to seek revenge for the murder of the caliph. The people wept bitterly when they saw the caliph's bloody shirt, and they told Mu'āwiyah: 'You are the cousin and lawful heir of the caliph. We are also seeking revenge for his murder as you are.' Then, they pledged allegiance to him as governor of the province of Syria.

Mu'āwiyah dispatched a number of individuals to inform the prominent personalities living in the province of Syria about the incident. He also wrote a letter to Shuraḥbīl Kindī, the influential personality of the city of Ḥimṣ, asking him to pledge allegiance to Mu'āwiyah as governor of the province of Syria. In response to Mu'āwiyah, he wrote: 'It was a big mistake on your part to have asked me to pledge allegiance to you as governor. Only a person who is the caliph of Muslims will be able to seek revenge for the former caliph's murder, not the one who is the governor of a province. Therefore, I pledge allegiance to you as caliph of Muslims.'

Mu'āwiyah became extremely happy when he received Shuraḥbīl's letter. He read out the letter to the people of Syria and called on them to pay allegiance to him as caliph of Muslims, and they did so. Soon afterwards, Mu'āwiyah entered into correspondence with Imam 'Alī.[1]

This part of history indicates that Mu'āwiyah was so predisposed to accept the caliphate that, following the allegiance pledged to him by an influential individual of the city of Ḥimṣ, he immediately stood as a candidate for the caliphate and announced his candidature in Syria and received the pledge of allegiance of the people of Syria without showing consideration for the allegiance paid by the revolutionaries, especially the allegiance pledged by the Migrants and the Helpers, to Imam ʿAlī. One would say that he had prepared the ground for his caliphate from many years earlier in such a manner that, in one session, he both requested and received the people's pledge of allegiance.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 69–70.

2. When Muʿāwiyah learned that the people of Medina had sworn allegiance to ʿAlī, before receiving any letter from the Imam he wrote two separate letters to Zubayr and Ṭalḥah, inciting them to take control of Kufa and Basra, the two major Islamic cities of Iraq. In his letter to Zubayr, he wrote, 'I have gained the pledge of allegiance for you from the people of Syria; therefore, make yourself ready to take control of Kufa and Basra as soon as possible. And after you, I have sworn allegiance to Ṭalḥah. Rise up to seek revenge for the murder of ʿUthmān as soon as possible and call on the people to do so.'

Zubayr became extremely happy by the contents of the letter and informed Ṭalḥah about it. Then, they both decided to rise up against the Imam.

Muʿāwiyah wrote another letter to Ṭalḥah whose contents were quite inconsistent with the contents of the letter written to Zubayr. In this letter, he wrote, 'I have paved the way for the caliphate of both of you. Whichever of you leaves the caliphate to the other one will be the caliph of Muslims after the death of the other one.'[1]

There is no doubt that, by inciting Ṭalḥah and Zubayr to lay claim to the caliphate and take control of Kufa and Basra, Muʿāwiyah pursued no objective but to undermine the position of the Imam and consolidate his own foothold in Syria. In other words, by fomenting discord and division in the ranks of the Imam and through the cooperation of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, he aimed to take the reins of government away from ʿAlī. In the event of success, it would be easy for Muʿāwiyah to achieve victory over Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, the worldly and – at the same time – simple companions of the Prophet.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 7.

3. Muʿāwiyah, at the beginning of the Imam's caliphate and also in the middle of the Battle of Ṣiffīn, proposed that the Imam appoint him as autonomous ruler of Syria and Egypt, that the tributes and taxes of these two regions be at his disposal, and that he should be the caliph of Muslims after the death of the Imam. Now we shall elaborate on this.

Soon after assuming the caliphate, Imam ʿAlī sent Jarīr Bijillī with a letter to Syria. In his letter, the Imam had written, 'The group that had pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and ʿUthmān also pledged allegiance to me. After the consensus among the Migrants and the Helpers and their swearing allegiance to me as caliph, nobody is entitled to select a caliph, whether he was in Medina at the time of their pledge of allegiance or not.'

Jarīr, carrying the Imam's letter, arrived in Syria and submitted the letter to Muʿāwiyah. But he procrastinated in replying to the letter and consulted with some individuals such as ʿAqabah and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ. Finally, he told the Imam's emissary what he had in mind, saying that if ʿAlī forgoes Syria and Egypt and allows him to use the income of those two regions, then he will recognise ʿAlī as caliph.

The emissary informed Imam ʿAlī of Muʿāwiyah's reply through a letter. In response to his emissary, the Imam wrote, 'Muʿāwiyah wants to evade paying allegiance to me and intends to ultimately attain his goal and consolidate his foothold through procrastination and by raising the issue of the autonomy of Syria and Egypt. Therefore, if he pledges allegiance to me, so much the better; otherwise, leave Syria and return to us without wasting time.'[1]

It is quite clear from the Imam's response that Muʿāwiyah's intention behind his proposal was to avoid the pledge of allegiance and obedience to Imam ʿAlī, to act as the autonomous ruler of the two vast regions of Egypt and Syria and to prevent the Imam from ever calling him to account or from appointing local authorities. Only God knows what he was planning to do against the Imam and his rule after consolidating his foothold in those regions. Besides, Muʿāwiyah's proposal meant the simultaneous existence of two rulers, an idea rejected by both common sense and religious law, and it would only have resulted in the division of the Islamic realm.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 89; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 538.

The clear proof of the fact that Muʿāwiyah was desirous of the caliphate, not acting as the representative of ʿAlī, is the following sentence in the Imam's letter to him: 'O Muʿāwiyah! Know that you are one of the "freed ones",[1] who are not entitled to the caliphate, and whose pledges of allegiance establish no caliphate, and who have no right to be on a council.'[2]

Muʿāwiyah's Excuse: The Assassins of ʿUthmān

Another evidence indicating that Muʿāwiyah was intent on attaining the caliphate was that, during the caliphate of Imam ʿAlī, he insisted more than anything else on ʿAlī's capturing the assassins of ʿUthmān so that the Imam's innocence and guiltlessness could be proved.

Muʿāwiyah knew well that the assassins of ʿUthmān were not just a couple of people whom the Imam could capture. The fact of the matter is that the attackers who besieged the house of ʿUthmān and killed him included a group of people from Medina and a large number of people from Egypt and Iraq, and it was not possible to identify members of such a large group. Muʿāwiyah himself was quite aware of this problem, and this is why he insisted on capturing all the attackers, not just the accomplices in the murder of ʿUthmān.

Besides, probing into such an incident was among the duties and responsibilities of the caliph of the Muslims, not the cousin of the former caliph, and if Imam ʿAlī had turned in the assassins of the former caliph to Muʿāwiyah, his action would itself have been tantamount to acknowledging the caliphate of Muʿāwiyah.

In one of his letters to Muʿāwiyah, the Imam wrote, 'You are going to extremes in your insistence with respect to the assassins of ʿUthmān. If you rectify your wrong attitude, I shall treat you and others in conformity with the divine book; but your asking that I cede Syria to you is like deceiving a baby into forgoing his mother's breast.'

In another letter to Muʿāwiyah, the Imam wrote, 'You are eagerly aspiring to something, but you should know that none of the freed ones are entitled to become the caliph of the Muslims or to be on the council charged with choosing the caliph.'

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[1] *Ṭulaqā*, or freed ones, were those forgiven by the Prophet at the conquest of Mecca.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 87.

The most evident proof that taking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān and the capture of his assassins were only excuses used by Mu'āwiyah for seeking the caliphate is the fact that when he took up the reins of power after the martyrdom of Imam 'Alī, he never brought up the issue of the murder of 'Uthmān or the capture of his killers. Even when the daughter of 'Uthmān appealed to Mu'āwiyah to avenge her father's murder, he replied to her that it was not possible for him to do so, and that it was good enough that she was the cousin of the caliph of Muslims!

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The Battle against the Nākithīn (the Battle of Jamal)

The unprecedented gathering of the companions of the Prophet from among the Migrants and the Helpers, who pledged allegiance to ʿAlī and called for the reestablishment of the rule of justice and truth, caused the Imam to accept the caliphate so that the public might be treated in conformity with the Islamic laws and traditions.

The way Imam ʿAlī distributed public funds angered those who were opposed to the administration of justice and the revival of good traditions, those who were in favour of discrimination and desirous of satiating their unending material and sensual desires.

During his five-year caliphate, Imam ʿAlī encountered three rebellious groups, groups whose mutiny and recalcitrance knew no bounds, and whose main demand was the restoration of the conditions that existed under ʿUthmān and the practice of undue generosity and extravagance as well as the retaining of selfish and inefficient provincial governors – governors like Muʿāwiyah – in their positions.

In the course of those encounters, during which the blood of Muslim brethren was spilled, a number of companions of the Prophet who had taken part in the battles of Badr and Uḥud, that is, who had fought in the company of the Prophet at the most crucial junctures of Islamic history, fought in the company of the true successor to the Prophet and sacrificed their lives for the sake of promoting his lofty objectives.

Apart from that, the valuable time of Imam ʿAlī which was expected to be spent in training individuals and guiding the *ummah* and imparting

Islamic teachings was actually spent in subduing those three groups which were posing an obstacle to the sacred goals of the Imam. Finally, before Imam 'Alī was able to accomplish his noble objective of establishing a world government based on the Islamic principles and traditions, the sun of his rulership set after five years of shining. Following his martyrdom, the Islamic government turned into a hereditary monarchy that was passed on from hand to hand by the sons of Umayyah and 'Abbās, and the idea of an Islamic government remained as a dream in the minds of the believers.

Those three groups were as follows.

1. The Nākithīn (the group that had broken its oath of allegiance): The leaders and standard-bearers of this group, especially Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, whose power had been curtailed under the rule of Imam 'Alī and who enjoyed the endorsement from 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet, as well as all-out support from the Umayyads, mobilised a massive army in order to conquer Kufa and Basra, and they managed to take control of Basra. But they were pursued by Imam 'Alī and a battle occurred between them, as a result of which Ṭalḥah and Zubayr were killed and their army was scattered. A number of their fighters were also taken captive, but they were later pardoned by the Imam.
2. The Qāsiṭīn (the unjust group that had deviated from the path of truth): This group was headed by Mu'āwiyah who, through trickery and deceitfulness and by giving rise to misleading events, preoccupied Imam 'Alī for some two years, or rather until the end of the Imam's life. The Battle of Ṣiffīn took place between Mu'āwiyah and Imam 'Alī in a region between Iraq and Syria, as a result of which the blood of over one hundred thousand Muslims was spilled. The Imam did not achieve his ultimate objective, although the battle led to Mu'āwiyah's isolation in the region of Syria.
3. The Māriqīn (the apostates): This group was the same as the group of Khawārij who, in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, fought in the company of, and in support of, Imam 'Alī. However, the deceptive actions of Mu'āwiyah caused them to rebel against the Imam and form a third group that was opposed to both the Imam and Mu'āwiyah. The threat which this group posed to

> Islam and the Muslim community and the rule of Imam 'Alī was more serious than the threat posed by the first two groups. The Imam encountered members of this group in a region called Nahrawān and disbanded them.

Imam 'Alī was once again on the verge of uprooting corruption and the *ṭāghūt* (illegitimate ruler) of Syria when he was assassinated at the hands of one of the Khawārij, drinking thereby from the cup of martyrdom. Consequently, humanity lost one of its noblest and most dignified men, and Islam the most competent and meritorious individual after the Prophet. Thus, the moon of the just Islamic government waned, and it will only wax again after the appearance of Imam al-Mahdī (may God hasten his advent).

Imam 'Alī knew that these tragic incidents would occur long before he faced them in reality. This is why when, after the murder of 'Uthmān, the revolutionaries thronged into his house and asked him to accept their oath of allegiance, he told them, 'Leave me and ask someone else, since I will be facing incidents with different aspects, incidents that can never be endured by hearts and minds.'[1]

One of the sources of information of the Imam about these tragic incidents that were to occur during his caliphate was what the Prophet had told him in this regard. Islamic traditionists have quoted the Prophet as saying to 'Alī, 'O 'Alī! You will fight against the Nākithīn and the Qāsiṭīn and the Māriqīn.'[2]

This tradition has been narrated in different forms in the books of hadith and history, but the purport of all of them is the same as what was related above.

'Alī was not the only person who had been informed about these bloody and lamentable incidents. The fact of the matter is that the leaders of the Nākithīn, who are known in the historical sources as the 'Companions of Jamal', had also been told by the Prophet about their battle against 'Alī, and the Prophet had personally warned Zubayr and 'Ā'ishah against that battle. But, unfortunately, their fondness for rulership had made them so keen on ephemeral material desires that they never allowed themselves to repent, and they continued treading a path which only led to transgression and sin and divine fury. We shall refer to the words of the Prophet about the Battle of Jamal at the right place.

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 156.

[2] *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 140.

It is very unfortunate that at the time of the flourishing of Islam when the caliphate had been vested in the rightful person and was turning on the right pivot and a man who had been trained for leadership from his early days of life had taken up the reins of government, and at the time when it was expected that Muslims would achieve great spiritual and material progress in this new stage of the life of Islam, and that the Islamic government would be completely renovated at the competent hands of Imam 'Alī so that his rule would set an example to the future generations, a number of opportunist elements rose in opposition to the Imam and raised the flag of fighting against him.

In one of his sermons, Imam 'Alī expresses regret about this occurrence and says,

> When I took up the reins of government, a group broke its oath of allegiance and another group abandoned the divine religion and another group deviated from the path of truth, as if they had not heard this Word of God that says: '*This is the abode of the hereafter which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favour of the Godwary*' (28:83). Yes, by God, they had heard it and learned it by heart, but the world appeared embellished in their eyes, and they were deceived by its ornaments.[1]

Childish Excuse

Although the group known as the Nākithīn, namely Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and their followers, had pledged allegiance to Imam 'Alī in broad daylight because of public pressure and the large gathering of the Migrants and the Helpers, they claimed at the time of raising their flag of opposition that their pledge of allegiance had only been verbal, and that they had not sworn allegiance to Imam 'Alī from the bottom of their hearts.

In one of his sermons, Imam 'Alī responds to them as follows, 'He admits to his pledge of allegiance, but is claiming that what he actually intended was the opposite. He should present testimony in support of his claim. Otherwise, he should revert to his oath of allegiance.'[1]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 4.

Hypocrisy and Duplicity

At one time Ṭalḥah and Zubayr went to Imam 'Alī and told him, 'We pledged allegiance to you in order to have a share in your leadership.' The Imam denied their claim and said in reply, 'You pledged allegiance to me so as to provide me with assistance when I need it.'[2]

Ibn Qutaybah in the book entitled *Khulafā'* (Caliphs) has referred to their discussions with Imam 'Alī as follows: 'They addressed 'Alī and said, "Do you know the reason why we pledged allegiance to you?" The Imam stated, "Yes, I know. You pledged allegiance to me in order to express your obedience to me, just as you did with regard to Abū Bakr and 'Umar."'

Zubayr was thinking that Imam 'Alī would appoint him governor of Iraq, and Ṭalḥah was assuming that the rulership of Yemen would be entrusted to him.[3] However, the way the Imam distributed public funds and his appointing other individuals as governors of Islamic provinces shattered their hopes. Consequently, they planned to flee from Medina and conspire against the Imam. Before their escape, at a general assembly of the Quraysh, Zubayr made the following remark, 'Is this our reward? We rose up against 'Uthmān and prepared the ground for his assassination while 'Alī was sitting in his house. But when he took up the reins of government, he appointed others to the positions of authority.'[4]

The Root of the Rebellion of the Nākithīn

Ṭalḥah and Zubayr lost all hopes of being appointed by Imam 'Alī as governors of some provinces. On the other hand, they received letters with similar contents from Mu'āwiyah in which they had been described as commanders of the faithful and told by Mu'āwiyah that he had obtained the pledge of allegiance of the people of Syria for them. He had called on them to take control of the cities of Kufa and Basra as soon as possible before the son of Abū Ṭālib established his rule over those cities.

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 8.

[2] Ibid., Aphorism 198.

[3] *The History of Caliphs* (Egypt edition), vol. 1, p. 49.

[4] Ibid.

Mu'āwiyah had also advised them to say everywhere that they were seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān and invite the people to join them in doing so.

These two naïve companions of the Prophet were deceived by Mu'āwiyah's letters, and they decided to go from Medina to Mecca in order to prepare for their rebellion in terms of men and armour. In carrying out the plot hatched by the son of Abū Sufyān, they went to see Imam 'Alī, and told him, 'You noticed the tyrannies of 'Uthmān in the affairs related to his caliphate and rulership, and you saw that he favoured the Umayyads and preferred them to others. So, now that God has bestowed the caliphate on you, appoint us as governors of Basra and Kufa.'

When Imam 'Alī heard what they said, he stated, 'Content yourselves with what God has apportioned to you and let me think about this. You should know that I appoint to positions of authority only those individuals whose piety and trustworthiness I am sure of and whose mentality I am aware of.'

The two became further disappointed when they heard the Imam's statement, since the way Imam 'Alī replied to their request made them realise that he did not trust them. Therefore, they changed the theme of their conversation and told the Imam, 'Would you allow us to go from Medina to Mecca for the *'umrah* (the lesser pilgrimage)?'

Imam 'Alī replied to them, 'The *'umrah* is a pretext for pursuing another goal.' They swore to God that they had no intention but to make the lesser pilgrimage. The Imam stated, 'You intend to act deceitfully and break your oath of allegiance.' They repeated their oath and once again pledged allegiance to the Imam.

When they left Imam 'Alī's house, he told those present at the meeting, 'I can see them getting killed in a rebellion.' Some of those present suggested that the Imam should prevent them from leaving Medina, but Imam 'Alī told them that the divine decree and destiny had to be fulfilled.

Ibn Qutaybah writes, 'After leaving 'Alī's house, they told an assembly of the Quraysh: "Our reward is what 'Alī has given us! We rose up against 'Uthmān and prepared the ground for his assassination while 'Alī was sitting in his house. But now that he is the caliph, he prefers others to us."'

Although Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had taken solemn oaths in Imam 'Alī's house, they denied their pledge of allegiance to 'Alī in their conversation with whomever they met on the way to Mecca after leaving Medina.[1]

'Ā'ishah Returns to Mecca from Halfway to Medina

It was previously stated that at the time the Egyptian and Iraqi revolutionaries had laid siege to the house of 'Uthmān, 'Ā'ishah left Medina for the hajj pilgrimage. She was in Mecca when she received the news of the assassination of 'Uthmān, but she was not informed who had succeeded 'Uthmān as caliph. Thus, she decided to depart Mecca and return to Medina.

On the way back to Medina, she met a man named Ibn Umm Kilāb at a dwelling place called Sarf, and she asked him about the conditions in Medina. He told her that the siege of the house of 'Uthmān lasted eighty days, and that the people who had surrounded his house then killed him and after a few days pledged allegiance to 'Alī.

When 'Ā'ishah was informed about the unanimity among the Migrants and the Helpers in pledging allegiance to the Imam, she became extremely angry and said, 'I wish the sky had fallen down on my head.' Then she ordered her entourage to take her back to Mecca. 'Ā'ishah also changed her attitude towards 'Uthmān, saying, 'I swear to God that he was unfairly killed, and I shall take revenge on his murderers.'

When Ibn Umm Kilāb heard what she said, he told her, 'You were the first person who told the people that 'Uthmān had forsaken his religion, and that it was incumbent on the people to kill 'Uthmān, who, you said, looked like the Jewish Na'thal. Now, why did you change the words that you had previously said?' In response to him, like someone who is shooting in the dark, 'Ā'ishah said, 'The murderers of 'Uthmān first got him to repent and then killed him. Everybody used to talk about 'Uthmān, and I had said something too. But what I just said about him is better than what I had previously said.'

This man composed a few verses that referred to the baseless excuse of 'Ā'ishah, the translation of some of which is as follows:

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 163; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 49; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, pp. 231–232.

You ordered the murder of the caliph,
telling us that he had forsaken the divine religion.
Certainly, we acted upon your order in killing him.
Therefore, we consider his murderer to be the person who ordered his murder!

On returning to Mecca, 'Ā'ishah dismounted from her camel in front of the Sacred Mosque. Then, she went to Ḥijr Ismā'īl (the area adjacent to the northern wall of Ka'bah) and hung a curtain there. The people gathered around her, and she told them, 'O people! 'Uthmān was unfairly killed, and I shall seek revenge for his murder.'[1]

The Base of the Opponents of Imam 'Alī

Following the murder of 'Uthmān and the pledge of allegiance of the people to Imam 'Alī, the land of Mecca turned into the base of the Imam's opponents, and the individuals who were opposed to the Imam or were afraid of his administration of justice, especially the governors of cities and provinces under 'Uthmān who knew that Imam 'Alī would confiscate their illegitimately amassed wealth and take them to task for their treacheries, all gathered together in Mecca, where they were under the cover of the sanctity of the divine sanctuary, and worked out the plan for the Battle of Jamal.

The Expenses of the Battle of Jamal

The expenses of the Battle of Jamal were covered by the provincial governors of 'Uthmān who, during his caliphate, had plundered the public treasury and amassed a fortune, and their goal was to topple the nascent government of 'Alī and restore the conditions that existed before.

The names of some of the individuals who covered the exorbitant expenses of this battle are as follows:

1. 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rabī'ah: He had been appointed by 'Uthmān as governor of the province of Sana'a in Yemen. He left Sana'a to assist 'Uthmān, but was informed about his assassination midway and thus returned to Mecca. When he heard that 'Ā'ishah was calling on the people to seek revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, he went into the mosque. While he was sitting on the couch, he yelled out, 'I shall cover

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 172.

the expenses of any person who wants to take part in this jihad to seek revenge for the murder of the caliph.' He equipped a large number of individuals for the battle.

2. Ya'lā ibn Umayyah: He had been one of the commanders of 'Uthmān's army. Following the example of 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rabī'ah, he spent a great deal of money for the sake of the battle. He bought 600 camels[1] and made them ready for departure outside Mecca and got a group of people to mount these camels, spending 10,000 dinars doing this.

When Imam 'Alī was informed about Ya'lā's lavish spending, he stated, 'Where has the son of Umayyah brought 10,000 dinars from? Is it not the case that he has stolen the money from the public treasury? I swear by God that if I capture him and the son of Abī Rabī'ah, I shall confiscate their wealth and return it to the public treasury.'[2]

3. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir: He had been the governor of Basra under 'Uthmān. He had fled from Basra to Mecca with a lot of possessions. He was also the one who had made the plan for the conquest of Basra and had encouraged Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and 'Ā'ishah to take control of this province.[3] In Mecca, the fugitive provincial governors of 'Uthmān had gathered together, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar and his brother 'Ubayd Allāh as well as Marwān ibn Ḥakam and the sons of 'Uthmān and his slaves and a number of the Umayyads had joined them.[4]

However, the call and invitation of this group, whose members were known faces, could not incite masses of people in Mecca and those who lived along the road from Mecca to Basra to rise up against the Imam. Therefore, in addition to the regular forces, which had been provided through the lavish spending of the dismissed provincial governors of 'Uthmān and the Umayyads, members of the group were also in need of a spiritual support in order to be able to provoke the religious sentiments of the Arabs who lived along the road. Thus, they invited 'Ā'ishah and Ḥafṣah to undertake the spiritual leadership of this group and accompany them to Basra.

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[1] Ibid., p. 166.

[2] *Jamal*, pp. 123–124; according to Ibn Qutaybah (*Khulafā* (Caliphs), p. 56), he put 60,000 dinars at the disposal of Zubayr and 40,000 dinars at the disposal of Ṭalḥah.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 55; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 166.

[4] *Jamal*, p. 121.

It is true that 'Ā'ishah raised the banner of opposition to Imam 'Alī the moment she arrived in Mecca, but she never had any plans to translate her opposition into action, and it never crossed her mind that she would undertake the leadership of an army and head for Basra. Therefore, when Zubayr sent his son 'Abd Allāh, who was 'Ā'ishah's nephew, to 'Ā'ishah's house in order to persuade her to rise up against the Imam and accompany them to Basra, she said in response to 'Abd Allāh's request, 'I have never ordered the people to rise in revolt. I came to Mecca in order to tell the masses about the way their caliph was killed, to tell them that a number of people killed him despite the fact that they had got him to repent, so that the people themselves will rise up against those who rebelled against the caliph and killed him and took up the reins of government without consulting others.'

When 'Abd Allāh heard what 'Ā'ishah said, he told her, 'Now that you hold this kind of attitude towards 'Alī and the assassins of 'Uthmān, why do you not extend aid and assistance to those who are opposed to 'Alī at a time when a number of Muslims have expressed their readiness to rise in revolt?'

In response to him, 'Ā'ishah said, 'Let me think about this for a while.' 'Abd Allāh inferred willingness from the tenor of her words. Therefore, when he returned home, he told Zubayr and Ṭalḥah that the Mother of the Faithful (*umm al-mu'minīn*) had granted their request. The next day he went to 'Ā'ishah's house to pursue the matter and managed to gain her definite and explicit agreement. Following that, the proclaimer of the group announced in the mosque and the market the collaboration of 'Ā'ishah with Ṭalḥah and Zubayr in revolt. Thus, the issue of rebelling against 'Alī and the plan for the conquest of Basra were finalised.[1]

Ṭabarī refers to the proclamation of the insurgents as follows:

> Be informed that the Mother of the Faithful and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr are heading for Basra. Whoever wants to dignify Islam and fight against those who have deemed it permissible to spill the blood of Muslims, and whoever wants to seek revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān is asked to join this group. And whoever does not have a mount and the money to

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[1] Ibid., p. 123.

> meet his travel expenses shall be given a mount and the money to cover his travel expenses.'[1]

In order to further provoke the religious sentiments of the masses, the actors on the stage of politics also asked Ḥafṣah, another wife of the Prophet, to accompany them to Basra. In response to them, she said, 'I am a follower of 'Ā'ishah. Now that she is ready to go on the journey, I also express my readiness to do so.' But when she was about to leave, her brother 'Abd Allāh prevented her from going on the journey. She sent 'Ā'ishah a message saying that she had been prevented by her brother from accompanying them.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 167.

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The Imam's Plan for the Capture of the Nākithīn

Shortly after Imam ʿAlī took up the reins of government, he set out to make the environment of the Islamic community free from the self-interested governors who treated the public treasury as their personal wealth, hoarding a major part of it and spending the rest promoting their personal interests; the governors who exercised autonomy in different parts of the Islamic realm and engaged in pillaging and plundering and ruled with an iron fist. Foremost among these governors was Muʿāwiyah ibn Abū Sufyān who, since the time of the second caliph, had lived in utter comfort in extravagant palaces befitting of Caesar; his excuse for following a lavish lifestyle being that he lived near Caesar, and whoever said anything against him was immediately banished or killed.

When Imam ʿAlī received the news of the disobedience of the self-interested governor of Syria, he decided to give a firm response to Muʿāwiyah's insubordination with his dedicated army. He was pondering this when suddenly a swift messenger brought a letter from Umm al-Faḍl, the daughter of Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, informing the Imam that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had broken their oath of allegiance and were heading for Basra.[1] The receipt of the letter changed the Imam's mind and caused him to head for Basra, instead of Syria, with his army in order to capture those who had broken their oath of allegiance midway and nip the rebellion in the bud. Thus, Imam ʿAlī appointed Tamām ibn ʿAbbās as governor of Medina and Qatham ibn 'Abbās as governor of Mecca[1] and left Medina for Basra with 700 devoted soldiers.[2] When he got to Rabadhah, he found that the Nākithīn, having foreseen that they might be captured halfway, had taken an alternate route to Basra with the help of experienced guides.[3]

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* (Egypt edition), vol. 5, p. 167.

If Imam 'Alī had been informed about their departure from Mecca earlier, he could have captured them halfway very easily and without meeting any resistance. The fact of the matter is that Zubayr's union with Ṭalḥah was a superficial union, as each one wanted to take the affairs in his own hands and remove the other one from the scene. The discord between the two was so deep that the moment they left Mecca, the signs of this conflict became evident. Even while they were heading for Basra, the issue of leading congregational prayers turned into a hot issue, since each one wanted to lead congregational prayers himself. Finally, 'Ā'ishah settled the dispute by forbidding both from leading the prayers and entrusting the task of prayer leadership to 'Abd Allāh, the son of Zubayr. Mu'ādh says, 'I swear to God that even if the two had won victory against 'Alī, they could have never reached an agreement with respect to the issue of caliphate.'[4]

Some of the companions of Imam 'Alī suggested that he desist from pursuing Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, but he did not accept their suggestion. What follows is the Imam's statement in response to their suggestion,

> I swear to God I am not like a hyena which falls asleep while its den is being lightly tapped at, and which is then suddenly captured, but I shall strike with the sharp swords of the upholders of truth those who turn their back on truth, and I shall repel the rebellious sceptics with the help of my obedient followers up until my death.[5]

Imam 'Alī announced his plan of action through the above statement and made it clear that it was not right to keep silent in the face of insurgency and extortion. He considered restructuring his army in order to achieve his aim.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 169.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 51; Ṭabarī puts the number of soldiers at 900 (*Ta'rīkh*, p. 169).

[3] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 169.

[4] Ibid.

[5] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 6.

Restructuring the Army

When Imam 'Alī was informed about the escape of the Nākithīn, he decided to pursue them to Basra, but the number of his companions did not exceed 700 or 900. It is true that most of the Imam's companions were elite fighters from among the Migrants and the Helpers, some of whom had also taken part in the Battle of Badr, but there were not enough of them to confront those who had been hired to fight, and who had also persuaded some tribes from areas around Basra to join them. Therefore, Imam 'Alī decided to restructure his army and seek assistance from the tribes in the region that were obedient to him.

Consequently, 'Adī ibn Ḥātim went to his tribe, the tribe of Ṭayy, and informed his tribesmen about Imam 'Alī's intention to subdue the Nākithīn. Addressing an assembly of the elders of his tribe, 'Adī said, 'O elders of the tribe of Ṭayy! At the time of the Prophet, you refrained from fighting against him, and you assisted God and His prophet in the Incident of the Apostates. Be informed that 'Alī will soon arrive here. In the days of ignorance, you fought for worldly objectives. Now, in the Islamic era, fight for the cause of the hereafter. If you are fond of the world, there are plentiful spoils with God. I call upon you to opt for both the world and the hereafter. Right now 'Alī and the great warriors who fought for the cause of Islam, including those from among the Migrants and the Helpers and those who took part in the Battle of Badr and others, are coming to you, and they will soon arrive here. Get up before it is too late, and be quick to welcome the Imam.'

The remarks made by 'Adī gave rise to great enthusiasm among those present at the assembly and elicited calls of approval and endorsement from the audience here and there, and all those present expressed their readiness to aid and assist the Imam. When Imam 'Alī arrived, an elderly member of the tribe stood in front of him and welcomed him with the following words, 'Greetings to you, Commander of the Faithful. I swear by God that even if we were not bound by our pledge of allegiance to you, still we would assist you because of your familial ties with the Prophet and your brilliant record of achievement. You move forward on the path of jihad and rest assured that all members of the tribe of Ṭayy will follow you, and that none of them will disobey you.'

The outcome of the action done by 'Adī was that a number of horsemen joined the Imam's army, as a result of which his army was restructured.

The tribe of Banī Asad lived next to the tribe of Ṭayy. One of the chiefs of the tribe of Banī Asad called Zafar, who had accompanied Imam 'Alī on the journey from Medina, obtained the Imam's permission to go to his tribe and invite his tribesmen to assist the Imam. After holding talks with members of his tribe, he managed to get a group of them prepared to assist the Imam and brought them to the Imam's camp. However, Zafar was not as successful as 'Adī with respect to the result of his invitation, since the latter had immense influence on his tribesmen because of his noble lineage and the great generosity of his father, Ḥātim, while Zafar did not enjoy such a position among his tribesmen. Besides, the tribe of Ṭayy had clearly displayed its firmness of belief and Islamic discipline in the Incident of the Apostates and, following the Prophet's departure, not even a single member of this tribe apostatised, whereas the tribe of Banī Asad renounced its religious faith and only again reverted to Islam as a result of the striving of the tribe of Ṭayy.[1]

An Account of the Journey of the Nākithīn to Basra

Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had been among the companions of the Prophet, but they did not have so much power and influence as to be able to rise up against the central government by themselves and lead an army from Mecca to Basra. If the wife of the Prophet had not joined them, and if the enormous wealth of the Umayyads had not been at their disposal, their plot and conspiracy would have been uncovered in Mecca itself and their machinations would have proved futile. Anyhow, claiming that they were seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, and that 'Alī was his killer or the supporter of his killers, they left Mecca for Basra and during their journey constantly chanted the slogan 'O seekers of revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān'. But this slogan was so ridiculous that even the kinsmen of 'Uthmān laughed at it. The two following incidents bear witness to the verity of this point.

Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ came across the army of the Nākithīn headed by Ṭalḥah and Zubayr in the Dhāt 'Irq region. Sa'īd, who himself belonged to the

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 53–54.

Umayyads, asked Marwān where they were going. Marwān replied that they were going to take revenge on the murderers of 'Uthmān. When Sa'īd heard this, he told Marwān, 'Why are you going far? The murderers of 'Uthmān are those who are moving behind you.' Sa'īd made this remark while he was pointing to Ṭalḥah and Zubayr.[1]

Ibn Qutaybah has described this incident in more detail. He writes:

> When Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and 'Ā'ishah dismounted in the land of Abū Ṭās in the Khaybar region, Sa'īd ibn 'Āṣ, accompanied by Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, walked to 'Ā'ishah, holding a black bow in his hand. He asked her, 'Where are you going?' She replied, 'I am going to Basra.' He asked, 'What do you want to do there?' 'Ā'ishah answered, 'I want to take revenge on the murderers of 'Uthmān.' When Sa'īd heard what she said, he told her, 'O Mother of the Faithful! The murderers of 'Uthmān are among those who are accompanying you.' Then, he went to Marwān and had the same conversation with him too. He told Marwān, 'The murderers of 'Uthmān are none other than Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, who killed him with the intention of replacing him as the caliph. But because they could not achieve their aim, they now intend to wash blood with blood and sin with repentance.'[2]

Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, Mu'āwiyah's right-hand man following the martyrdom of Imam 'Alī, addressed the people on that day and said, 'O people! If you are accompanying the Mother of the Faithful on this journey, wish her success; and if you are seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, the murderers of 'Uthmān are none other than your own leaders; and if you have set out on this journey with the aim of criticising 'Alī, say what fault you have found with him. For God's sake, refrain from staging two revolts [i.e. the murder of 'Uthmān and fighting against 'Alī] in one year.' However, neither the words said by Sa'īd nor the remarks made by Mughīrah had any influence on the audience. Consequently, Sa'īd left for Yemen, and Mughīrah headed for Ṭā'if, and neither of them took part in the battles of Jamal or Ṣiffīn.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 472.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 58.

Speedy Journey

Ṭalḥah and Zubayr were covering the distance between Mecca and Basra with great speed in order to avoid getting captured by the Imam. They also considered obtaining a swift camel for 'Ā'ishah so that she could arrive in Basra as soon as possible. Halfway between Mecca and Basra, they saw an Arab from the tribe of 'Urniyah who was riding a flat-footed *jamal* (male camel). They asked him to sell his camel. He put the value of his camel at 1,000 dirhams. The buyer objected to him, saying, 'Are you out of your mind? Which camel on earth is worth 1,000 dirhams?' The owner of the camel told him, 'You do not know about it. No camel is able to compete with it in a race.' The buyer said, 'If you realise who I want this camel for, you will give it away without asking a single dirham for it.' The Arab asked, 'Who do you want this camel for?' The buyer replied, 'For the Mother of the Faithful, 'Ā'ishah.' When the owner of the camel heard this, he gave his camel freely because of his devotion to the prophetic presence. The buyer intended to hire him as a guide and, thus, took him to the place where 'Ā'ishah and her companions had dismounted. There, he was given a female camel plus 400 or 600 dirhams in return for his camel and was asked to help the caravan traverse part of that desert, and he accepted.

The guide, who was among those with the most familiarity with the desert, says:

> Whenever we passed by a habitation and a water-well, 'Ā'ishah asked me the name of that locality. When we were travelling across the land of Ḥaw'ab, the local dogs started barking. The Mother of the Faithful leaned out of the camel-litter and asked me, 'What is this place called?' I replied, 'It is called the land of Ḥaw'ab.' As soon as 'Ā'ishah heard the word 'Ḥaw'ab', she shouted and immediately tapped the camel on the leg and made it stop and kneel down. She said, 'I swear to God that I am the same woman who travels across the land of Ḥaw'ab and at whose camel the local dogs bark.' She repeated this sentence three times and then shouted at her companions to return her to Mecca. When the Mother of the Faithful stopped, the caravan also stopped, and the camels were made to kneel down. The insistence on resuming the journey did not prove effective, and 'Ā'ishah stayed there until the next day. But finally her nephew, 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr, came to her and said, 'You had better

> continue the journey without delay, since ʿAlī is chasing us and we may all be captured by him."[1]

Ṭabarī relates the incident the way it was quoted above because of his prejudice and intention to cover up what had actually happened. However, Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH / 889 CE), who lived before the time of Ṭabarī, writes:

> When the Mother of the Faithful was informed about the name of the land of Ḥaw'ab, she told the son of Ṭalḥah, 'I must return, since one day the Prophet was speaking to his wives, among whom I was also present, and he said, among other things, "I can see one of you traversing the land of Ḥaw'ab with the local dogs barking at her." Then he addressed me and said, "Ḥumayrā! I warn you against being that woman."' Then, the son of Ṭalḥah insisted on continuing with the journey, but his insistence did not prove effective. Her nephew, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Zubayr, hypocritically swore that the name of that locality was not Ḥaw'ab, and that they had travelled across the land of Ḥaw'ab early during the night. Besides telling this untruth, they also brought a number of Bedouins who falsely attested that the name of that region was not Ḥaw'ab. This kind of false testimony was unprecedented in the history of Islam. Afterwards, members of the caravan resumed their journey and finally dismounted near Basra with the intention of capturing this city, whose governor was ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf, who had been appointed by Imam ʿAlī.[2]

The Nākithīn Approach Basra

When the caravan of the Nākithīn reached the vicinity of Basra, a man from the tribe of Tamīm suggested that ʿĀ'ishah should inform the influential personalities of Basra about her intention before arriving in the city. Acting upon his advice, ʿĀ'ishah wrote a number of letters to the prominent figures of Basra and then dismounted in a place called Ḥufayr, where she waited for the replies to her letters.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd quotes Abī Mikhnaf as saying that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr also wrote a letter to ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf, the governor of Basra, asking him to turn over the governor's seat to them. When ʿUthmān received their letter, he summoned Aḥnaf ibn Qays and informed him about the contents of the letter. Aḥnaf told him by way of counsel, 'Those who are seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān have themselves spilled his blood, and I deem it necessary for you to be prepared to encounter them. You are the governor, and the people will listen to you. Therefore, before they set upon you, you go and confront them.'

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 975.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 9, p. 312.

'Uthmān replied, 'I also hold the same view, but I am waiting for orders from the Imam.'

After Aḥnaf left, Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah 'Abdī arrived at the governor's court. 'Uthmān read to him the letter that he had received from Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. Ḥukaym also expressed an opinion similar to that held by Aḥnaf and asked 'Uthmān to allow him to confront the Nākithīn. He told 'Uthmān, 'If they revert to obedience to the Commander of the Faithful, so much the better; otherwise, I shall fight against them.'

'Uthmān replied to him, 'If a decision is made to confront them, I shall have precedence over you in doing so.'

Ḥukaym further told 'Uthmān, 'You had better act quickly, since if the Nākithīn arrive in Basra, they will elicit sympathy from the people because of the companionship of the Prophet's wife, and they will oust you from your position.'

Under these circumstances, 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf received a letter from Imam 'Alī informing him about Ṭalḥah and Zubayr's treachery and their heading towards Basra. 'Uthmān had been ordered to call on Ṭalḥah and Zubayr to keep their pledge of allegiance and to treat them well if they did so; otherwise, he had been told to fight against them, so that God would arbitrate between them. The Imam had sent his letter from Rabadhah. It had been dictated by the Imam to his secretary, 'Ubayd Allāh.[1]

Following consultation with his aides and after receiving the Imam's letter, the governor of Basra immediately summoned 'Imrān ibn Ḥaṣīn and Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī,[2] the two prominent personalities of the city, and assigned them to go from Basra to the place where the leaders of the Nākithīn had dismounted in order to meet Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and ask them about the objective of their military expedition to Basra.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 59.

[2] The top students of Imam 'Alī and the founders of the discipline of syntax.

Consequently, they immediately went to the camp of the Nākithīn and met 'Ā'ishah and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. In reply to their question, 'Ā'ishah said, 'A group of people killed the Imam of Muslims – despite the fact that he was guiltless – and spilled venerated blood and plundered unlawful property and desecrated a holy month. I have come here to disclose the crimes of this group and tell people what to do in this regard.'[1] According to another narration, she said, 'I have come here to assemble an army and punish the enemies of 'Uthmān with the help of it.'

The two left the Mother of the Faithful and went to see Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and asked them, 'Why have you come here?' They replied, 'We have come here to seek revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān.' The governor's emissaries asked, 'Have you not sworn allegiance to 'Alī?' They replied, 'We pledged allegiance because we were afraid of Ashtar's sword.' Then, the emissaries returned to the governor and informed him about the intention of the Nākithīn.

The governor decided to prevent the Nākithīn from arriving in Basra with the help of a popular force. Therefore, proclaimers called on the people living in the city and in the suburb of Basra to gather in the mosque. The governor's spokesman introduced himself to the crowd as an individual from Kufa and as a member of the tribe of Qays so as to hide his real identity. He told the crowd: 'If members of this group say that they have come to Basra for fear that they might be killed, this is a baseless statement because they were in the divine sanctuary (Mecca), where even the flying birds are safe and secure; and if they have come here to seek revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, the killers of 'Uthmān are not in Basra and should not be looked for here. O people! It is necessary for you to rise up against them and make them return to the place where they have come from.'

At this moment, a man by the name of Aswad stood up and said, 'They do not regard us as the killers of 'Uthmān, but they have come here to seek help from us with the intention of taking revenge on his murderers.' Although Aswad's remark elicited opposition from the majority, it indicated that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had some supporters among the residents of Basra.

The caravan of the Nākithīn left the place where it had dismounted and headed towards Basra, and 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf also moved to encounter and stop them, and the two sides came face to face with each other in a region called Marbad. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and their army were on the right side of the region, and 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf and his companions were on the left. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr talked about the merits of 'Uthmān and his being unfairly treated and called on the people to seek revenge for his murder. There were shouts of approval from the supporters of the two, but the companions of the governor denied what Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had said, and there followed a bitter dispute between the two sides. But at this stage there was no division within the companions of the governor. When 'Ā'ishah noticed the situation, she addressed the crowd and said: 'The people were always complaining about the agents of 'Uthmān here and there and conveying their grievances to us. When we looked into their grievances, we found him to be an innocent and virtuous and faithful individual, and we found the informants to be deceitful and lying. When the critics became strong, they invaded his house and spilled his blood in a holy month with no excuse. Be aware that it is incumbent upon you – and on none other than you – to capture his killers and carry out the divine decree about them.'

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 174.

Then, she recited this verse: '*Have you not regarded those who were given a share of the Book, who are summoned to the Book of God in order that it may judge between them*' (3:23).

'Ā'ishah's remarks gave rise to division within the governor's companions, and a group of them endorsed her while another group denied her remarks, and the two factions began to throw soil and stones at each other. Then, 'Ā'ishah left Marbad for a place called Dabbāghīn while schism ruled 'Uthmān's companions, a number of whom ultimately joined the Nākithīn.

The Nākithīn Reproached

'Ā'ishah was reproached in the place where she had dismounted by a man from the tribe of Banī Sa'd who told her, 'O Mother of the Faithful! The killing of 'Uthmān is more tolerable for us than your leaving home and riding this cursed camel. God had bestowed on you a veil of sanctity and reverence,[1] but you tore your veil of reverence and destroyed your sanctity. If you have come here at your discretion, return from this same place, and if you have come here with reluctance, seek help from us.'

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[1] He was alluding to the noble verse about the Prophet's wives: '*Stay in your houses and do not display your finery with the display of the former* [*days of*] *ignorance*' (33:33).

Another young man from the tribe of Banī Sa'd addressed Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and said, 'O Zubayr! You were among the disciples of the Prophet. O Ṭalḥah! You protected the Prophet against harm with your hand. I can see that your mother is accompanying you. Have you also brought along your wives?' They answered in the negative. He told them, 'At this moment I am parting from you.' Then, he composed a poem, its opening verse being as follows: 'You have seated your wives behind the curtain, but you have brought along your mother. I swear to your life that this shows a lack of fairness.'[1]

Afterwards, Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah al-'Abdī and his men came to assist the Imam's governor, and a violent fight broke out between him and the supporters of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. In order to make the two sides move apart, 'Ā'ishah ordered them to leave that place and go towards the Banī Māzin cemetery. When they got there, darkness fell and separated the two sides. Consequently, the governor also returned to the city.

The companions of 'Ā'ishah gathered in a place called Dār al-Rizq that night and prepared themselves for fighting. The next day, Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah set upon them and a bloody encounter took place between them, as a result of which a number of them from both sides were killed or wounded.

Temporary Peace between the Two Sides

Up to the present stage in the chain of events, historians are unanimous in recounting the events in the way in which they were related above. But as to the ensuing events, there arises the question of how the two sides reached an agreement to stop fighting and wait for another event to occur. Ṭabarī and – following him – Jazarī in *Kāmil* have given two accounts of the ensuing events. It seems that the second account is closer to reality. However, both accounts will be given here.

1. An Inquiry about the way Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had Pledged Allegiance

Ṭabarī writes:

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 482; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 213–214.

> The two sides agreed to write a letter to the people of Medina and inquire about the way Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had pledged allegiance to Alī. If the people of Medina attested that the two had sworn allegiance at their discretion, then Ṭalḥah and Zubayr would have to return from that place to Medina and refrain from causing trouble for ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf. But if the people of Medina testified that they had pledged allegiance with reluctance and out of fear for their lives, then ʿUthmān would have to leave Basra and turn over the governor's seat and the public treasury and whatever was at his disposal to Ṭalḥah and Zubayr.

Ṭabarī has included the text of the peace treaty in his history and pointed out that Kaʿb ibn Sūr took it to Medina, where he read the message from the people of Basra to the people of Medina in the city's mosque on a Friday. However, nobody replied to him except someone called Usāmah, who said that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had not sworn allegiance at their discretion, but that they had done so with reluctance and out of fear for their lives. When the people of Medina heard what he said, they became so angry that they moved to kill him, and if some individuals such as Ṣuhayb and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah had not come to his rescue, his blood would certainly have been spilled. Kaʿb talked about what he had seen in the mosque of Medina when he returned to Basra. Consequently, Ṭalḥah and Zubayr sent a message to ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf asking him to turn over the governor's seat. They argued in their message that it had been proved that their pledge of allegiance had not been based on willingness and inclination.

Based on that related above, peace and reconciliation seems very unlikely, and this account is far from reality for the following reasons:

1. This account has been given by Sayf ibn ʿUmar, whom researchers do not regard as a reliable and truthful person. But, unfortunately, a part of Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* (the events related to the years 11–36 AH / 632–656 CE) is replete with his narrations.
2. Travelling from Basra to Medina and returning to Basra took a lot of time, and the Nākithīn knew that Imam ʿAlī had left Medina and was chasing them. Therefore, in view of this imminent danger, it was not wise for the Nākithīn to accept that kind of peace treaty and procrastinate and refrain from capturing Basra and deposing its governor and, instead, wait for a reply from Medina.

3. That kind of peace treaty would be accepted by those who were assured that the companions of the Prophet would testify to their reluctant pledge of allegiance, but the Nākithīn were not assured of that. Even one might say that they were sure that the companions of the Prophet would not give such a testimony. According to what Ṭabarī has quoted from Sayf ibn ʿUmar, only one person who was among those that had refused to swear allegiance to Imam ʿAlī attested that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had pledged allegiance to the Imam reluctantly, and the others, according to the account given by Sayf, kept silent.
4. The clearest evidence in support of the fact that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had not pledged allegiance to the Imam with reluctance is that a number of individuals such as Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, Usāmah, and Ḥassān had refused to swear allegiance to Imam ʿAlī and kept themselves aloof from everything and nobody caused any trouble for them. If Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had not been willing to pledge allegiance to the Imam either, they could have joined these individuals. For this reason, when the Imam was informed about their claim, he made the following statement about Zubayr:

> Zubayr alleges that his pledge of allegiance was not sincere, and that he did not swear allegiance from the bottom of his heart. In any case, he admits to his pledge of allegiance, but claims that he has been harbouring its opposite. He should present testimony in support of his claim. Otherwise, his pledge of allegiance remains valid, and he should be obedient and complying.[1]

Also, later on, after the leaders of the Nākithīn had been killed, the Imam made the following remark about them:

> O God! Ṭalḥah and Zubayr severed their ties with me and treated me unjustly and broke their oath of allegiance to me and incited the people to rebel against me. O God! Make loose what they tightened, and do not strengthen what they spun, and mete out on them the punishment for what they desired and what they committed. Before the battle, I gave them a respite

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Sermon 8.

so that they might revert to their pledge of allegiance. But they showed ingratitude and lost the prosperity of the two worlds.[1]

2. Asking the Imam what to do

According to the second account of the way the two sides reached an agreement, 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf told the Nākithīn that he had been appointed by Imam 'Alī and could by no means meet their demand and that the only thing that he could do was to write a letter to the Imam and ask him what to do concerning the matter.[2] Ibn Qutaybah writes:

> The two sides agreed that 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf could remain in his position as governor and keep the mosque and the public treasury under his control; and that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr could dismount and stay wherever they wished until they received a reply from Imam 'Alī. If they reached an agreement with the Imam, so much the better; otherwise, each side was free to proceed as it wished. They vowed to comply with the treaty and called on a group from both sides to witness the treaty.[3]

The second account seems closer to reality, but this does not mean that the leaders of the Nākithīn had accepted the peace treaty sincerely and from the bottom of their hearts. The fact of the matter is that while pretending to accept the treaty, they intended to launch a night assault on the governor's seat and capture it at the earliest opportunity and dismiss 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf from his post as governor of Basra. It is narrated that 'Ā'ishah wrote a letter to Zayd ibn Ṣawḥān calling him her special son and asking him to join their group or, at least, stay in his house and refrain from assisting 'Alī. In response to her letter, Zayd wrote, 'May God have mercy on the Mother of the Faithful. She has been ordered to stay at home, and we have been ordered to engage in jihad. She is not performing her duty, but is asking us to do what she herself is supposed to do! In other words, she has set herself to do what we are charged with doing and is trying to prevent us from carrying out our duty.'

According to Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, the leaders of the Nākithīn consulted with each other and reminded one another that they were weak and certain to suffer defeat if they encountered 'Alī and his army. Consequently, they wrote letters to the chiefs of nearby tribes and managed to win the support of a number of tribes such as the tribes of Azd, Ḍabbah, and Qays ibn Ghaylān. Nevertheless, some tribes remained loyal to the Imam.[1]

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 133.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 486; *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 216; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 9, p. 319. The last book includes the text of the peace treaty.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 64.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 9, pp. 320–321.

8

A Bloody Coup

Under those circumstances, the leaders of the Nākithīn felt that they had become powerful. Consequently, only a short while after 'Uthmān had sent his letter to the Imam, they attacked the mosque and the governor's seat at the time of the night prayer on a cold night with a cool wind – or, according to another narration, at the time of the dawn prayer – and killed the guards of the mosque and the governor's seat and the prison, whose number is given differently in various narrations, and thus took control of the most important places of the city. Then, each of the Nākithīn leaders made a speech in order to win the support of the public.

Praising the murdered caliph, Ṭalḥah told the public, 'The caliph had committed a sin, but later repented for it. We first intended to rebuke him, but our fools overpowered us and killed him.' When the people heard what Ṭalḥah said, they told him in protest, 'But the contents of the letters that you had sent to us about the caliph were different from what you are saying now. You used to urge us to rise in revolt against him.'

At this moment, Zubayr stood up and, in order to exonerate himself, told the crowd, 'But you had received no letter from me.'

Afterwards, a man from the tribe of 'Abd al-Qays stood up and gave an account of the way the four caliphs had attained the caliphate. The gist of what he said was that the Migrants and the Helpers had appointed the first three caliphs to their caliphal positions without consulting with others, and that they finally pledged allegiance to 'Alī, but again without conferring with others. Then, the man asked the following questions, 'Now what fault have you found with 'Alī? Has he misappropriated public funds? Has he acted wrongly? Has he committed a sin? If none of these has been done, then why have you risen in revolt against him?'

The man's sound and strong logic angered those who were fond of the world, and they moved to kill him, but were prevented from doing so by the man's fellow tribesmen. However, the next day they ganged up on him and put him as well as seventy other people who had come to help him to the sword. Then, they took up the reins of everything, from the leadership of congregational prayers to the control of the public treasury, and thus achieved part of their objectives.[1]

Fate of the Governor

The firmness of purpose displayed by the governor in safeguarding the position and status of the Imam had exasperated the Nākithīn. This is the reason why the moment they captured him, they trampled him and pulled out the hair on his head and face. Then, they consulted with one another about his killing. Finally, they decided to let him go, since they were afraid that the governor's brother Sahl ibn Ḥunayf, who was in Medina, might strongly react to his murder.

'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf left Basra in order to have a meeting with Imam 'Alī. When the Imam noticed his appearance, he told 'Uthmān by way of jesting, 'You left us as an old man, but now you have returned to us looking like a youth!' 'Uthmān told the Imam what had befallen him.

The number of people who were killed in this bloody coup is given differently in various narrations.

According to Ṭabarī in *Ta'rīkh* and Jazarī in *Kāmil*, some forty people were killed in the incident, but Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd puts the number of those killed at seventy. Also, according to Abī Mikhnaf in *Jamal*, 400 people were killed in this incident.[2]

What is touching is the fact that the Nākithīn captured those killed, who were all the guards of the mosque and the governor's seat and the prison, through trickery and deception and then beheaded them all atrociously.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 485; *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 217; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 65.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 9, p. 321.

Uprising of Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah

Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah, who had been deeply affected by the pitiable deposing of 'Uthmān and the heinous murder of the guards of the governor's seat, decided to fight the Nākithīn with the help of 300 members of the tribe of 'Abd al-Qays. Thus, he organised four battalions and assigned a commander to each one of them. Afterwards, accompanied by his three brothers, he set upon the Nākithīn, who had the Prophet's wife mount the camel for the first time in order to stir the emotions of the people and incite them to confront Ḥukaym and his companions. For this reason, the day of Ḥukaym's uprising is also called the day of camel, but in order to differentiate it from the famous Day of Jamal, the former is referred to as 'the minor day of *jamal*' while the latter is described as 'the major day of *jamal*'.

In the course of this battle, all 300 companions of Ḥukaym as well as his three brothers were killed. Consequently, in the absence of any opponents, Ṭalḥah and Zubayr faced no obstacle to their attainment of the rulership of Basra. But because both were desirous of the rulership, a bitter dispute broke out between them about the leadership of congregational prayers, since any one of them who led congregational prayers on that day was considered to be the ruler. When 'Ā'ishah was informed about their dispute, she banned both from leading the prayers and assigned the task to the sons of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. Hence, one day 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr led congregational prayers, and the next day Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah performed the task.

When they opened the door of the public treasury and noticed the great public wealth stored there, Zubayr recited the following verse: '*God has promised you abundant spoils which you will capture. He has expedited this one for you*' (48:20).

Zubayr added, 'We have priority over the people of Basra in possessing this wealth.' Then he appropriated all the public property. However, when Imam 'Alī captured Basra, he returned the entire wealth to the public treasury.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 322; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3; *Kāmil*, vol. 3.

Imam 'Alī is Informed about the Coup

The land of Rabadhah is the land of memories. The Imam had long been familiar with this land, especially since the day when Rabadhah turned into the place of exile of some of his devoted followers, including Abū Dharr, the noble companion of the Prophet who had been exiled to Rabadhah because of his protests against the prevalent discrimination and extravagance. After a lapse of some years, the divine destiny had caused the Imam to come to this region in order to gather a combat force with the intention of capturing the Nākithīn.

The Imam was in Rabadhah when he learned about the deplorable coup staged by the Nākithīn and was informed that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had arrived in the city of Basra and killed the guards of the governor's seat, the mosque, the public treasury, and the prison and had taken control of the city by spilling the blood of hundreds of people; that they had expelled Basra's governor, who had been appointed to his position by the Imam, after beating him up and pulling out the hair on his head and face, and that they had managed to win the support of a number of tribes of Basra through poisonous propaganda.

At this stage, the Imam intended to seek assistance from the residents of Kufa in subduing the Nākithīn, since his only remaining stronghold in the land of Iraq was the city of Kufa and its nearby tribes. However, the governor of Kufa, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, acted as an impediment in this respect because he regarded any kind of uprising as a tribulation and would prevent the people from assisting the Imam.

Abū Mūsā was the governor of Kufa when the Migrants and the Helpers pledged allegiance to the Imam. After taking up the reins of the caliphate, Imam 'Alī allowed him to remain in his position following consultation with Mālik al-Ashtar. However, another factor that also contributed to the Imam's decision to do so was Abū Mūsā's abstention from squandering or appropriating the public property stored in the public treasury. As a matter of fact, Abū Mūsā was different from other governors appointed by 'Uthmān in this respect.

Anyhow, the Imam decided to dispatch a number of prominent figures to Kufa and send letters to Abū Mūsā and the residents of Kufa so that they would pave the way for the dispatch of combat forces, or else to dismiss Abū Mūsā from his position and appoint another governor if such measures did not prove effective. The following is a brief account of the measures that Imam 'Alī took in this regard.

1. Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr is Sent to Kufa

Imam 'Alī sent Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr and Muḥammad ibn Ja'far with a letter to Kufa. They read the letter, which sought aid and assistance from the residents of Kufa, to a public assembly, but the insistence of Abū Mūsā on his own position caused the efforts of the two to prove abortive. When the people consulted Abū Mūsā about the issue, he would tell them, 'Sitting at home is the way of the hereafter, and rising up is the way of the world.'[1] (Choose whichever way you prefer!) Consequently, the Imam's emissaries left Kufa without getting any results. They met the Imam at a place called Dhī Qār and told him about the outcome of their mission to Kufa.

2. Ibn 'Abbās and Mālik al-Ashtar are Sent to Kufa

With respect to this issue, like in other similar cases, Imam 'Alī intended to refrain from taking tough measures as long as negotiations had not reached a deadlock. Thus, before dismissing Abū Mūsā from his position, he decided to send another two prominent figures, namely Ibn 'Abbās and Mālik al-Ashtar, to Kufa in order to resolve the issue through negotiations. Therefore, he told Ashtar, 'You are expected to rectify what you have done and which has now yielded an unfavourable result.' Then, the two left for Kufa and met and negotiated with Abū Mūsā.

This time, Abū Mūsā changed the wording of his remarks and told the Imam's emissaries,

> This is a tribulation in which being asleep is better than being awake, and the one who is awake is in a better position than the one who is sitting, and the one who is sitting is in a better position than the one who is standing, and standing is better than riding on a mount, and the one who is riding on a mount is in a better position than the one who is persevering.[2]

Then, he told them, 'Sheathe your swords and...'

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 393, 496.

[2] Ibid., p. 496.

Thus, this time also the Imam's emissaries, despite their great efforts, disappointedly returned to the Imam and informed him about Abū Mūsā's obstinacy and eccentric position.

3. Imam Ḥasan and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir are Dispatched

Imam 'Alī then decided to convey his message through the agency of more senior personalities, and the most suitable individuals for this purpose were his eldest son, Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā, and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir. The former was the Prophet's grandson cherished by the Prophet, and the latter was among the first who had embraced Islam, and the Muslims had often heard the Prophet praising him.

These two great figures also arrived in Kufa with a letter from the Imam. First, Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā read the Imam's letter to the people. The contents of the letter were as follows:

> From the servant of God, 'Alī, Commander of the Faithful, to the people of Kufa, the honourable helpers,[1] and high-ranking Arabs. Now, I shall inform you about 'Uthmān's case (murder) in such a way that you will be able to visualise what happened to him. The people criticised him for his actions, and I was a man from among the Migrants who was more trying to make him pleased and reproached him less, whereas the behaviour of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr towards him could be compared to that of a stampeding camel, which will run faster as a result of the slightest pressure, and which will suffer from pains if it is forced to run slower. Besides these two, 'Ā'ishah also suddenly got angry with him, and finally a group of people overpowered him and killed him. Then, the general public pledged allegiance to me without the least reluctance and with the utmost inclination. O people! The land of migration [Medina] has expelled its residents and turned into a boiling pot, and a tribulation has been brought about. Rush to your commander and engage in jihad against your enemy.[2]

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[1] In the Imam's letter the phrase '*jabhat al-ansār*' is used. *Jabhah* means 'group' or 'forehead', and *anṣār* means 'helpers', but not the Helpers as opposed to the Migrants, since before Imam 'Alī's migration from Medina to Kufa, those particular 'Helpers' did not reside in this city.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 1.

After Imam 'Alī's letter was read to the public, it was time for the Imam's emissaries to talk to and enlighten the people. When the Imam's son began to speak, the eyes were riveted on him and the audience prayed to God to strengthen his word and reasoning. Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā, leaning on a staff or spear, told the public:

> O people! We have come here to call upon you to adhere to the divine book and the prophetic tradition and to follow the most learned and the most equitable and the most distinguished and the most steadfast individual to whom the Muslims have pledged allegiance, to call upon you to follow the one whom the Qur'an has not found any fault with, whom the prophetic tradition has not disavowed, and who preceded everybody else in expressing his faith in someone with whom he had two bonds [i.e. faith and kinship] and whom he never left alone. On the day when the people had dispersed from around him [i.e. the Prophet], God made his help suffice; and he used to say his prayers with the Prophet while others were idolaters.
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> O people! Now this person is seeking assistance from you and calling upon you to uphold the truth, and he is expecting you to support him and rise up against those who have broken their pledge of allegiance and killed a number of pious men from among his followers and plundered his treasury. Rise to your feet – may divine mercy be upon you – and join him and enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil and what the righteous prepare, you also prepare.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd quotes two speeches for Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā from the famous historian Abī Mikhnaf, one of which was translated above. Both speeches are quite surprising with respect to their ability to excite the feelings of the public and explain Imam 'Alī's position.[1]

When Imam Ḥasan's speech came to an end, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir stood up and praised God and sent greetings to His prophet. Then, he made the following remarks: 'O people! The Prophet's brother and cousin is calling upon you to help him uphold the divine religion. May you be ruled by an imam who does not do anything wrong, and a scholar who does not need to be taught, and a powerful man who never fears, and the one foremost in faith who is not equalled by anyone. If you see him, he will tell you the truth.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, pp. 11–14; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 499–500.

The words of the Prophet's grandson and his high-ranking companion captured the hearts and further aroused the conscience of the audience and rent aside what the naïve governor had spun. Soon, a wave of enthusiasm swept through the crowd. In particular, when Zayd ibn Ṣawḥān read 'Ā'ishah's letter to the people of Kufa, he surprised them all. In her letter, she had asked Zayd to stay in his house and refrain from helping the Imam. After reading the letter, Zayd told the people in a loud voice, 'O people! Be aware that it is the duty of the Mother of the Faithful to stay at home and it is my duty to engage in jihad on the battlefield. Now she is inviting us to do what she herself is supposed to do, but she has undertaken a task that we are expected to perform!'

These events caused the situation to change in the Imam's favour and a group of men expressed their readiness to assist him, and some 12,000 men left their homes to join the Imam.

Abū al-Ṭufayl says, 'Before the army from Kufa arrived at his camp, the Imam had told me that those who were coming to him from Kufa numbered 12,001. After they arrived, I counted them all and realised that they numbered neither one more nor one fewer than the number stated by the Imam.'[1]

Shaykh al-Mufīd, however, puts the number of men from Kufa who joined the Imam at 6,600. He says, 'The Imam had told Ibn 'Abbās that 6,600 men would join him in two days, and that they would kill Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. Ibn 'Abbās says that when he inquired about the number of men, he was told that they numbered 6,600.'[2]

The Futile Attempts of Abū Mūsā

Aggravated by the change in Kufa's situation, Abū Mūsā turned his face to 'Ammār and the crowd of people and said, 'I heard the Prophet say that a tribulation will soon take place, a tribulation in which the one sitting will be in a better position than the one standing, and that both will be in a better position than the one riding on a mount, and God has forbidden us from spilling each other's blood or plundering each other's property.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, pp. 11–14; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 499–500.

[2] *Jamal*, p. 157.

'Ammār retorted contentiously, 'Yes, but the Prophet meant you, not others, because your sitting is better than your standing.'[1]

It is necessary here to ponder briefly on the above-mentioned tradition. Supposing that it had been stated by the Prophet, was it certain that the Prophet had been referring to the *jamal* incident? Was countering the transgression perpetrated by those who had beheaded 400 people like sheep with the intention of attaining to power a tribulation in which sitting was better than standing?

After the demise of the Prophet many incidents occurred, from Saqīfah to the murder of 'Uthmān. Why should the prophetic tradition not refer to these incidents? If we turn the pages of history and consider the events that took place between the years of 11 AH / 632 CE and 35 AH / 655 CE, we will realise that some of those incidents were quite regrettable. Could one simply ignore the bitter incident of Mālik ibn Nuwarah? Would it be possible to forget the events that occurred under the third caliph, including the beating and exile of the pious? Why should this tradition not relate to the time of the caliphate of Mu'āwiyah or Marwān or 'Abd al-Mālik?

Besides, there are some basic principles in Islam, including the principle of obeying those in authority, which can by no means be disregarded. Obeying the caliph, whether he is clearly designated or chosen by the Migrants and Helpers, is an Islamic duty acknowledged by everybody. Abū Mūsā also recognised Imam 'Alī as the one in authority, because he accepted the Imam's order and remained in his position as governor of Kufa and, from then on, did everything in the capacity of a governor appointed by the Imam. Therefore, he should not have opposed the Qur'anic text by invoking an ambiguous tradition against the verse: '*Obey God and obey the messenger and those vested with authority among you*' (4:59).

Dismissal of Abū Mūsā from the Position of Governor

The dispatch of several emissaries and the futility of all efforts prompted the Imam to dismiss Abū Mūsā from his position. The Imam had already given him an ultimatum through a letter, which read as follows: 'I have sent Hāshim ibn 'Atabah to you, so that he will dispatch the Muslims to us with your help. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to cooperate with him in doing so. I have appointed you to this position so that you will uphold the truth.'

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 498.

When Imam 'Alī gave up hope that the letters or the emissaries would be able to change the governor's viewpoint and position, besides dispatching Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā to Kufa, he also sent a letter to Abū Mūsā officially dismissing him from the position of governor and appointing Qaraẓah ibn Ka'b to the post instead. The contents of the letter were as follows: 'I deem it proper that you resign from this position, a position of which no share has been apportioned to you by God, and God will prohibit you from disobeying my order. I have dispatched Ḥasan ibn 'Alī and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir to marshal the people to assist us, and I have assigned Qaraẓah ibn Ka'b as governor. Thus, resign from your post, blameworthy and failed!'

The contents of the letter were revealed to the public. Soon afterwards Mālik al-Ashtar, who had also been sent to Kufa at his own request, took control of the governor's seat and transferred it to the new governor. As for Abū Mūsā, he left Kufa the next day.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 501.

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Imam ʿAlī leaves Dhī Qār for Basra

Imam ʿAlī was in Rabadhah when he was informed about the bloody coup staged by the Nākithīn, and he was in Dhī Qār when he made his firm decision to punish the opponents.

The dispatch of some prominent personalities such as Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā and ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir to Kufa gave rise to a surge of enthusiasm among the residents of Kufa and caused a group of them to rush to the Imam's camp in Dhī Qār. Afterwards, Imam ʿAlī left Dhī Qār for Basra with greater fighting strength.

Imam ʿAlī, like the Prophet, wished to give an ultimatum to his opponents before confronting them on the battlefield, even though the truth was manifest to them. Therefore, he wrote separate letters to the leaders of the Nākithīn, that is, Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, and ʿĀ'ishah. In those three letters, the Imam condemned their action and severely criticised their killing of the guards of the governor's seat and the public treasury of Basra and censured them for their unfair treatment of ʿUthmān ibn Ḥunayf. The letters were delivered to them by Ṣaʿṣaʿah ibn Ṣawḥān, who says:

> First, I met Ṭalḥah and handed him the letter. After Ṭalḥah read the letter, he said, 'Is ʿAlī showing flexibility now that the war is putting pressure on him?' Then, I met Zubayr and found him to be more tolerant than Ṭalḥah. Afterwards, I handed ʿĀ'ishah the letter that the Imam had written to her, but I found her to be more prepared for war than the others. She said, 'I have revolted with the intention of seeking revenge for the murder of ʿUthmān, and I swear to God that I am intent on doing so.'

Ṣa'ṣa'ah further says:

> I met the Imam before his arrival in Basra. He asked me, 'What is happening back there?'
>
> I replied to him, 'I saw a group that is pursuing no aim but to fight against you.'
>
> The Imam stated, 'We seek assistance from God.'[1]

When Imam 'Alī learned that the leaders of the Nākithīn had made a firm decision to fight, he summoned Ibn 'Abbās and told him to meet Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and 'Ā'ishah and remind them that they had sworn allegiance to the Imam. Ibn 'Abbās met Ṭalḥah and reminded him of his pledge of allegiance to the Imam, but he told Ibn 'Abbās that he had sworn allegiance while being threatened with a sword. When Ibn 'Abbās heard what he said, he told Ṭalḥah, 'I noticed that you pledged allegiance to him of your own free will because when you were about to express your oath of allegiance to 'Alī, he told you that he would swear allegiance to you if you wished him to do so, but you said that you would pledge allegiance to him.' Ṭalḥah replied to him, 'It is true that 'Alī said that, but at that time a group of people had already pledged allegiance to him, and it was not possible for me to express any opposition.' Then, he added, 'We are seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, and if your cousin wishes to prevent the blood of Muslims from being spilled, he should turn in the killers of 'Uthmān and abdicate the caliphate so that it will be vested in a council, which will then choose as caliph whoever it wishes. Otherwise, we have nothing to offer him but our swords.'

Ibn 'Abbās seized the opportunity to reveal the facts. He told Ṭalḥah: 'Do you remember that you laid siege to 'Uthmān's house for the whole ten days and prevented water from being taken to his house? And when 'Alī tried to persuade you to allow water to be taken to his house you did not agree to do so, that when the Egyptians noticed such resistance they entered his house and killed him? Then the people pledged allegiance to someone who had a brilliant record and possessed great virtues and was a close relative of the Prophet, and you and Zubayr also swore allegiance to him without any reluctance or compulsion to do so? Now you have broken your pledge of allegiance. How surprising it is that you were calm and quiet under the three former caliphs, but you rose up as soon as 'Alī's turn came. I swear to God that 'Alī is not inferior to the likes of you. As regards your remark that he should turn in the killers of 'Uthmān, you know his killers better, and you also know that 'Alī is not afraid of your swords.'

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[1] *Jamal*, p. 167.

At this moment, feeling embarrassed at the strong logic of Ibn 'Abbās, Ṭalḥah put an end to the discussion and told Ibn 'Abbās to stop arguing with him. Ibn 'Abbās says: 'I immediately went to Imam 'Alī and informed him about the result of the discussion. He told me to talk with 'Ā'ishah too and convey to her the following message: leading a military expedition is beneath a woman's dignity and you had never been assigned to do so, but you did so and went to Basra with others and killed Muslims and expelled appointed officials and opened the doors and deemed it permissible to spill the blood of Muslims. Come to your senses and remember that you were one of the most relentless enemies of 'Uthmān.'

When Ibn 'Abbās conveyed the message to 'Ā'ishah, she replied, 'Your cousin is thinking that he has taken control of the cities. I swear to God that if he has something in hand, we have more than that at our disposal.'

Ibn 'Abbās told 'Ā'ishah, "Alī possesses great virtues as well as a brilliant record and has gone to great pains for the sake of Islam.'

When 'Ā'ishah heard what he said, she told him, 'Ṭalḥah also suffered a lot in the Battle of Uḥud.'

Ibn 'Abbās further said, 'I do not think anyone among the Prophet's companions has suffered more hardships than 'Alī has done for the sake of Islam.'

At this moment, 'Ā'ishah displayed fairness and said, 'Apart from this, 'Alī has other merits too.'

When Ibn 'Abbās heard what she said, he seized the opportunity and told her, 'For the sake of God refrain from spilling the blood of Muslims.'

'Ā'ishah replied, 'The blood of Muslims will be spilled so long as 'Alī and his followers kill themselves.'

Ibn 'Abbās says, 'When I noticed the feeble reasoning of the Mother of the Faithful, I smiled and told her that 'Alī is accompanied by some insightful men who would sacrifice their lives for his cause. Then I left her.'

Ibn 'Abbās further says:

> Imam 'Alī had advised me to talk to Zubayr too, preferably in the absence of Zubayr's son, 'Abd Allāh. I went to see him twice, but he was not alone

> on either occasion. The third time that I went to see him he was alone. He told his servant, Sharḥash, not to allow anybody to enter the room. Then I began to speak. First, I found him to be angry, but gradually I calmed him down. When his servant became aware of the influence of my words, he immediately informed Zubayr's son, and I stopped talking when he entered the room. Zubayr's son referred to the caliph's murder and the approval of the Mother of the Faithful in order to justify his father's uprising. I told him, 'Your father is responsible for the caliph's murder, because he had either killed him or, at least, refused to assist him. The Mother of the Faithful's approval does not prove the legitimacy of his action either. You made her leave her home in spite of the fact that the Prophet had told her: "'Ā'ishah! I warn you against being the woman at whom the dogs in the land of Ḥaw'ab bark."' Finally, I told Zubayr, 'I swear to God that we counted you as a member of the Banū Hāshim. You are the son of Ṣafiyyah, Abū Ṭālib's sister, and the cousin of 'Alī. But when your son 'Abd Allāh grew up, he severed the ties of kinship.'[1]

However, Imam 'Alī's words in *Nahj al-Balāghah* indicate that he did not feel hopeful that talking with Ṭalḥah would yield any positive results, and thus he had told Ibn 'Abbās to meet and talk with Zubayr only. Perhaps these instructions related to the second assignment of Ibn 'Abbās. The Imam's eloquent words addressed to Ibn 'Abbās are as follows:

> Do not meet Ṭalḥah, because if you do so you will find him to be like a bull whose horns have twisted around his ears. He is riding on a defiant mount, but is supposing that it is tame and docile. Instead, meet Zubayr, who is more tolerant, and tell him: 'Your cousin says, "You recognised me in Hejaz, but denied me in Iraq. What prevented you from recognising me as you did on the first occasion?"'[2]

Qaʿqāʿ ibn 'Amr is dispatched to Basra

Qaʿqāʿ ibn 'Amr, the well-known companion of the Prophet, lived in Kufa and was held in high regard by his fellow tribesmen. He was instructed by Imam 'Alī to meet the leaders of the Nākithīn. The text of his negotiations with the leaders of the Nākithīn is included in Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* and Jazarī's

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[1] Ibid., pp. 167–170.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 31.

Kāmil. Thanks to his strong reasoning, Qaʿqāʿ caused the Nākithīn to change their minds and made them ready for peace with the Imam. When he returned to Imam ʿAlī and informed him about the outcome of his negotiations, the Imam was surprised at the flexibility of the Nākithīn.[1]

At this time, a group of people from Basra came to the Imam's camp in order to learn about the views of Imam ʿAlī and their Kūfī brethren who had joined the Imam. After they returned to Basra, the Imam made a speech to his men. Then, they left that region and dismounted in a place called Zāwiyah. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr and ʿĀ'ishah also left their position and dismounted in a region which later became the site of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād's palace and confronted the Imam's army.

Both armies were at ease. The Imam dispatched some individuals with the intention of resolving the issue of insurgents through negotiations. He even sent a message to the effect that if they still kept the promise that they had made to Qaʿqāʿ, the two sides could begin to exchange views. However, the signs all indicated that the problem could not be resolved through negotiations, and that the rebellion could not be quelled except by resorting to the sword.

The Imam's Policy of Reducing the Number of Enemy Forces

Aḥnaf ibn Mālik was a tribal chieftain who also had considerable influence over his neighbouring tribes. He was in Medina when the house of ʿUthmān was under siege. At that time he had asked Ṭalḥah and Zubayr to whom he should swear allegiance after ʿUthmān, and both of them had recommended ʿAlī. When Aḥnaf returned from the hajj pilgrimage and learned that ʿUthmān had been killed, he pledged allegiance to the Imam and then went to Basra. He was surprised when he was informed that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had broken their pledge of allegiance to the Imam. Aḥnaf was asked by ʿĀ'ishah to assist them, but he turned down the request and said, 'I have pledged allegiance to ʿAlī on the recommendation of these two persons, and I would never engage in fighting against the Prophet's cousin, but I shall remain neutral.' Afterwards, he went to see the Imam and told him, 'My fellow tribesmen say that if ʿAlī achieves victory, he will kill the men and take the women captive.' In reply to his remark, Imam ʿAlī stated, 'You should not fear a person like me. This is permissible with respect to those who turn their backs on Islam and renounce their faith, but members of this group are Muslims.' When Aḥnaf heard what the Imam stated, he said, 'Choose between these two: either I shall fight in your company, or I shall rid you of 10,000 swordsmen.' The Imam told him, 'It would be better if you kept your promise to remain neutral.' Owing to his influence over his own tribe as well as his neighbouring tribes, Aḥnaf prevented them all from taking part in the battle. When Imam 'Alī achieved victory, they all pledged allegiance to the Imam and joined him.

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[1] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 229.

Imam 'Alī meets Ṭalḥah and Zubayr

In Jumādā al-Thānī 36 / November 656, Imam 'Alī met the leaders of the Nākithīn between the two armies. The two sides were so close that the ears of their horses touched. First, the Imam addressed Ṭalḥah and told him, 'You have taken up arms and mobilised men fighting on foot and on horseback. If you have a reason or excuse for doing so, let us hear it. Otherwise, refrain from disobeying God and do not be like the woman who tore to bits what she had spun. Was I not your brother and did I not deem it unlawful to spill your blood and did you not deem it unlawful to spill my blood too? Have I done anything, as a result of which you now deem it permissible to spill my blood?'

Ṭalḥah replied, 'You incited the people to kill 'Uthmān.'

When the Imam heard what Ṭalḥah said, he told him, 'If I have done so, God will punish the people for their deeds on a certain day, and at that time the truth will become manifest to all. O Ṭalḥah! Are you seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān? May divine damnation be upon the murderers of 'Uthmān. You have brought along the Prophet's wife in order to fight under her auspices while you have left your own wife at home. Have you not pledged allegiance to me?'

Ṭalḥah replied to the Imam, 'It is true that I pledged allegiance to you, but I did so while I was being threatened with a sword.'

Then, Imam 'Alī addressed Zubayr and stated, 'What is the reason for this insubordination?'

Zubayr replied, 'I do not believe that you are more suitable than me for this position.'

When the Imam heard his remark, he told Zubayr, 'Am I not suitable for this position?! [Zubayr, as one of the six members of the council for appointing the third caliph, had voted in favour of ʿAlī.] We counted you among the descendants of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib until your son, ʿAbd Allāh, grew up and caused separation between us. Do you remember the day when the Prophet was passing by the tribe of Banī Ghanam? He looked at me and smiled and I smiled too. You told the Prophet that ʿAlī would not desist from jesting, and the Prophet told you: "I swear to God that you, O Zubayr, will fight against him and, at that time, you will be a wrongdoer."'

When Zubayr heard the Imam's statement, he told the Imam, 'You are right, and if I had remembered this incident, I would not have trodden this path. I swear to God that I shall not fight against you.'

Influenced by the Imam's words, Zubayr returned to ʿĀ'ishah and told her about what had taken place. When ʿAbd Allāh was informed about his father's decision, he began to reproach him in order to make him change his mind. He told his father, 'You have assembled these two groups here, and now that one side has become strong, do you intend to leave the other side and go away? I swear to God that you are afraid of the swords that ʿAlī has raised because you know that they are carried by some brave men.'

Zubayr said, 'I have sworn an oath not to fight against ʿAlī. Now what am I supposed to do?'

ʿAbd Allāh replied, 'You can make atonement for your oath. You had better free a slave by way of atonement.' Consequently, Zubayr freed his slave, Makḥūl.

This incident reveals Zubayr's superficial outlook on the events. When he remembered a prophetic statement, he swore an oath not to fight against ʿAlī. However, later, incited by his son, he disregarded the Prophet's statement and broke his oath and, instead, made atonement for it.

The signs all indicated that a military confrontation was inevitable. Therefore, the Nākithīn decided to bolster up their combat forces.

In the regions where people live in the form of tribes, the handling of affairs rests with the chiefs of those tribes, and their views and decisions are totally accepted. In one of the tribes near Basra there was a prominent personality called Aḥnaf, whose joining the Nākithīn would have greatly increased their power and raised the number of their men by more than 6,000. However, Aḥnaf rightly realised that cooperation with them was based on nothing except worldly desires. He clearly perceived that seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān was merely an excuse, and that the Nākithīn, motivated by a thirst for power, actually intended to depose 'Alī and take up the reins of the caliphate. Therefore, acting upon the Imam's advice, he remained neutral and prevented some 6,000 men belonging to his own tribe and the nearby tribes from joining the ranks of the Nākithīn.

Aḥnaf's neutrality cost the Nākithīn dearly. Besides him, they were also pinning their hopes on the judge of Basra, Ka'b ibn Sūr. But when they sent him a message asking him to join them, he also refused to join the ranks of the Nākithīn. When they noticed his refusal, they decided to meet him and discuss the matter in his presence, but he did not grant them permission to meet him. Consequently, they had no option but to ask 'Ā'ishah to meet him.

'Ā'ishah mounted a mule and a number of residents of Basra gathered around her mount. She went to the residence of the judge, who was the chief of the tribe of Azd and was held in high esteem by the people of Yaman, and requested permission to enter, and her request was granted. 'Ā'ishah asked the judge about the reason for his neutrality. He replied that there was no need for him to take part in that tribulation. 'Ā'ishah told him, 'My son! Rise up, since I can see something which you cannot see.' (What she meant was that she could see angels coming to support the believers, by which she meant the Nākithīn!) She added, 'I fear God, who is a severe punisher.' Thus, she persuaded the judge of Basra to join the Nākithīn.

'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr's Speech and Imam al-Mujtabā's Response

Following the deployment of the Nākithīn army, Zubayr's son made a speech which was also heard by Imam 'Alī's followers. Afterwards, Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā responded to 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr's speech with a sermon. Then, a competent poet recited a poem in praise of Imam 'Alī's son which excited the feelings of the audience. Imam al-Mujtabā's words and the recited poem influenced the Nākithīn army, because the son of the Prophet's daughter revealed Ṭalḥah's attitude towards 'Uthmān. Consequently, Ṭalḥah gave a speech in which he referred to the tribes following Imam 'Alī as hypocrites.

Ṭalḥah's words offended the ones in his army that had ties of kindred with those tribes. Suddenly a man stood up and said, 'O Ṭalḥah! Are you insulting the tribes of Muḍar and Rabī'ah and Yaman? I swear to God that we are from them and they are from us.' When he said this, the men who were around Zubayr tried to arrest him, but the tribe of Banī Asad prevented them from doing so. However, the objections were not over, and another person called Aswad ibn 'Awf also stood up and repeated what the first man had said. These incidents all indicated that although Ṭalḥah was experienced in warfare, he was not aware of the principles of politics, especially under sensitive circumstances.

Imam 'Alī's Speech

Under those fateful circumstances, Imam 'Alī stood up and made the following speech: 'Ṭalḥah and Zubayr arrived in Basra in spite of the fact that the people of Basra had pledged allegiance to me and were obedient to me. They called on the people to rise up against me and killed whoever was opposed to them. You all know that they killed Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah and the guards of the public treasury and expelled 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf from Basra in a most atrocious manner. And now that their faces have been unmasked, they are declaring war.'

When Imam 'Alī ended his speech, Ḥakīm ibn Manāf breathed new life into the Imam's army by reciting a poem in praise of the Imam. The translation of two verses of the poem is as follows:

O Abū al-Ḥasan! You awakened those who were asleep,

but not everyone invited to the truth would listen.

You are the man endowed with the best of every quality,

and God is the Endower and the Withholder.

The Imam gave the Nākithīn a three-day respite so that they might cease their opposition and revert to their pledge of allegiance and obedience to him. But when he gave up hope of their doing so, he made a speech to his followers and elaborated on the atrocities that had been committed by the Nākithīn. When the Imam's speech ended, Shaddād 'Abdī stood up and referred to his correct knowledge of the Prophet's household in the following words:

> When the sinners increased in number and the opponents rose up in revolt, we sought help from our prophet's household, those through whom God has conferred honour and dignity on us and guided us from the state of aberration to the right course. It is incumbent upon you, O people, to follow them and keep yourselves apart from those who have deviated to the right or to the left and let them sink into the whirlpool of aberration.[1]

Imam 'Alī's Final Ultimatum

On Thursday 10 Jumādā al-Awwal 36 / 4 November 565, Imam 'Alī addressed his army, telling his men not to make haste so that he might give a final ultimatum to the the Nākithīn. Then, he handed a Qur'an to Ibn 'Abbās and told him, 'Go with this Qur'an to the leaders of the Nākithīn and invite them to this Qur'an. Also, ask Ṭalḥah and Zubayr: Have you not sworn allegiance to 'Alī? Why have you broken your pledge of allegiance? Then, tell them: "May this divine book arbitrate between us."'

Ibn 'Abbās first went to Zubayr and conveyed the Imam's words to him. In reply to the Imam's message, Zubayr said, 'I did not pledge allegiance of my own free will, and I do not need the Qur'an's arbitration, either.' Then, Ibn 'Abbās went to Ṭalḥah and told him, 'The Commander of the Faithful wants to know why you have broken your pledge of allegiance to him.' Ṭalḥah said, 'I am seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān.' Ibn 'Abbās told him, 'His son Abān is more competent than anyone else to do so.' Ṭalḥah replied, 'He is a weak individual and we are stronger than he is.'

Finally, Ibn 'Abbās went to 'Ā'ishah and saw her sitting in a litter on the back of a camel, with the reins of the camel being held by the judge of Basra, Ka'b ibn Sūr, and the camel being surrounded by some members of the tribes of Azd and Ḍabbah. When 'Ā'ishah saw Ibn 'Abbās, she told him, 'Why have you come here? Go and tell 'Alī that there is nothing between us except the sword.'

Ibn 'Abbās returned to the Imam and told him what had happened. Imam 'Alī decided to give one more ultimatum to the Nākithīn in order to resort to the sword with clear justification. Therefore, he addressed his army and stated, 'Is there anyone among you, who is willing to take this Qur'an to the opposite group and invite them to it and if they cut off his hand, hold it in his other hand and if they cut off both his hands, carry it with his teeth?' At this time a young man stood up and said, 'I am ready, O Commander of the Faithful.' The Imam once again addressed his followers and repeated his words, but nobody except the same young man replied. Thus, the Imam handed the book to the young man and told him, 'Present the Qur'an to this group and tell them: may this book arbitrate between us from the beginning to the end.'

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[1] *Jamal*, pp. 178–179.

Acting upon the Imam's instructions, the young man went to the enemy with the Qur'an. They cut off both his hands, and he carried the divine book with his teeth until the moment he died.[1]

This incident revealed the obstinacy of the Nākithīn and indicated that the outbreak of war was inevitable. Nevertheless, the Imam once again displayed tolerance and magnanimity and, before the outbreak of war, told his army, 'I know that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr will not give up unless they shed blood. But you do not begin the war and let them do so. If any one of them escapes, do not chase him. Do not kill the injured, and do not unclothe the enemy.'[2]

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 520.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 243.

10

Valorous Acts of Imam ʿAlī's Army and the Fall of the *Jamal*

There is nobody among the world's military commanders who has given so much respite to his enemy and displayed so much patience and forbearance as Imam ʿAlī did. The Imam continued to dispatch prominent figures to the enemy's camp to invite the enemy to the Qur'an's arbitration and delayed the battle to such an extent that his own followers and companions began to voice objections. Consequently, the Imam deployed his army and appointed the following individuals as his commanders: Ibn ʿAbbās as chief commander of the army's vanguard; ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir as chief commander of the cavalry; and Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr as chief commander of the infantry. Then, he assigned some individuals as standard-bearers of the cavalry and infantry of the tribes of Mudhḥaj and Hamdān and Kindah and Quḍāʿah and Khuzāʿah and Azd and Bakr and ʿAbd al-Qays, and so forth. The men who were in the Imam's army and under his command on that day, including those in the cavalry and infantry, numbered around 16,000.[1]

The Nākithīn Begin the War

While Imam ʿAlī was giving military instructions to his army, suddenly a barrage of arrows was shot by the enemy at the Imam's camp, as a result of which several of the Imam's followers were killed. Among those killed was also the son of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Badīl. ʿAbd Allāh brought his son's body to the Imam and told him, 'Are we still expected to display patience and forbearance so that the enemy may kill us one after another? I swear to God that if your intention is to give them an ultimatum, you have done so.'

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[1] *Jamal*, p. 172.

'Abd Allāh's remarks caused the Imam to get prepared for the war. Thus, he put on the Prophet's armour and mounted the Prophet's mule, which he had brought along, and headed the ranks of his followers. Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah,[1] one of the most devoted companions of Imam 'Alī, recited a poem in praise of the Imam and the flag which he had raised. The translation of two verses of the poem is as follows:

The flag we are now gathering around is the same flag we gathered
around at the time of the Prophet, and at that time
Gabriel was our aid and assistant.

The one whose confidants are the Helpers will be at
no disadvantage if he has no other assistants.

Imam 'Alī's large and disciplined army caused the Nākithīn to get ready for the confrontation, and they brought the camel, which was carrying the litter in which 'Ā'ishah was sitting, to the battlefield and gave its reins to the judge of Basra, Ka'b ibn Sūr, who had a divine book hanging from his neck, and some members of the tribes of Azd and Banū Ḍabba were surrounding the camel. 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr was standing in front of 'Ā'ishah, and Marwān ibn Ḥakam was standing on her left. Zubayr was in charge of the Nākithīn army, Ṭalḥah was the commander of the cavalry, and Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah was the commander of the infantry.

On the Day of Jamal, Imam 'Alī handed the standard to his son, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, and addressed him with some remarks that are the most sublime of military rallying talks. The Imam told his son:

> Even if the mountains begin to shake, you remain steadfast and do not waver; clench your teeth; lend your skull to God; stand firm on the ground; always direct your eyes to the remotest part of the opposing side [i.e. try to advance as far as there] and drop your eyes and know that, indeed, victory comes from God, the Glorified.[2]

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[1] The book *Jamal* (by Shaykh al-Mufīd) refers to Qays ibn 'Abādah, but apparently it is Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Abādah whom the writer has in mind.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 11.

Each of the above statements is a maxim full of meaning that deserves elaboration, but this shall be skipped for the sake of brevity.

When the people asked Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah why the Imam had sent him to the battlefield, but had prevented Ḥasan and Ḥusayn from going to the battleground, he replied, 'I am my father's hand, and they are his eyes. He protects his eyes with his hand.'[1]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, quoting some historians such as Madā'inī and Wāqidī, narrates the incident as follows:

> Imam 'Alī, accompanied by Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, decided to attack the enemy's army with a group called *Katībat al-Khaḍrā'* which comprised the Migrants and the Helpers. Thus, he handed the standard to his son Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah and gave him the order to advance and told him, 'Continue to advance until you thrust this standard into the eye of the camel.' The Imam's son was about to advance when he was stopped by a barrage of arrows. He waited for a few moments in order for the arrows to subside. At this time, the Imam once again ordered his son to attack. But since he felt some hesitation on the part of his son, he took pity on him and took the standard from him and, while holding the sword in his right hand and the standard in his left hand, attacked the enemy himself and advanced as far as the heart of the enemy's army. After that, the Imam returned to his companions in order to straighten his bent sword.

The Imam's companions such as 'Ammār and Mālik and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn asked the Imam to stay there and allow them to make the attacks. But the Imam did not reply to them and did not even look at them. He was roaring like a lion and totally concentrating on the enemy's army and noticing nobody besides them. Then, he once again handed the standard to his son and launched a new attack on the enemy, advancing as far as the heart of the enemy's army and mowing down whoever he saw in front of him. Enemy forces ran away from him and took shelter in nearby places. During the attack, the Imam killed so many of enemy forces that the ground turned red from their blood. Then, he returned to his camp and straightened his bent sword by pressing it against his knees. At this time, the Imam's companions surrounded him and endured him by God to desist from attacking the enemy personally. They argued that if he got killed, that would lead to the annihilation of Islam. They also assured the Imam that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for his cause. The Imam replied to them that he was fighting in the way of God, and that he was desirous of divine pleasure. Then, he addressed his son Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah and told him, 'Look! This is the way you are supposed to attack.' Muḥammad replied, 'Who can attack the way you do, O Commander of the Faithful!'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 244.

Afterwards, Imam 'Alī sent a message to Ashtar instructing him to attack the left flank of the enemy's army, which was under command of Hilāl. During this attack Hilāl was killed, and the judge of Basra, Ka'b ibn Sūr, who was holding the reins of the camel, and 'Amr ibn Yathribī Ḍabbī, who was the hero of the Nākithīn army, and who had been appointed by 'Uthmān as judge of Basra and held the position for quite a while, were also killed. The Nākithīn forces were doing their utmost to keep 'Ā'ishah's camel on its feet, since it was the symbol of their perseverance and resistance. Thus, when the Imam's army mounted a massive attack on the camel, they also put up a strong resistance and some seventy men in the Nākithīn army lost their hands trying to keep the reins of the camel.[1]

While a number of the Nākithīn were being beheaded, or their hands were being cut off, or they were being disembowelled, others were still staunchly defending the camel. At this moment, Imam 'Alī shouted to his companions, 'Woe unto you! Hamstring the camel, for verily it is the Devil. Hamstring it, or else the Arabs will be exterminated. The swords will keep going up and coming down as long as this camel is on its feet.'[2]

Imam 'Alī's Method of Boosting his Army's Morale

In order to boost his army's morale, Imam 'Alī used the slogan 'O victorious one! Take life!' He also sometimes used the slogan 'They will not be helped'. Both these slogans had been used for the first time by the Prophet in fighting against the idolaters, and they played a great role in undermining the enemy's morale because they were reminiscent of Muslim wars against the idolaters. Consequently, 'Ā'ishah began to chant the following slogan so as to raise the morale of the Nākithīn army: 'O my sons! Be patient and attack, since I guarantee your place in paradise'!

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[1] Ibid., p. 265.

[2] Ibid., pp. 257–267.

Because of this slogan, a number of men gathered around her and advanced to such an extent that they were only a few steps away from the Imam's army.

'Ā'ishah asked for a handful of soil with the intention of inciting her companions. After it was given to her, she threw it at the Imam's followers and said: 'May you be disgraced'. In doing so, she was imitating the Prophet who also, in the Battle of Badr, threw a handful of soil at the enemy and said the same words, and God revealed to him the following verse: '*And you did not throw when you threw, rather it was God who threw*' (8:17).

When Imam 'Alī noticed what 'Ā'ishah did, he immediately stated: 'And it was not you who did it when you threw [the handful of soil], but it was Satan who did it'. What the Imam meant was that if in the case of the Prophet the actual doer was God, in the case of 'Ā'ishah the real doer was Satan.

The Camel is Hamstrung

'Ā'ishah's camel was an innocent animal that was being used for evil purposes, and because it was carrying the litter in which 'Ā'ishah was sitting, it was invested with a certain sanctity. The Nākithīn army had been trying as hard as possible to protect the camel and keep it on its feet, and a large number of men in this army had lost their hands trying to hold the reins of the camel, since as soon a person lost his hand, another person tried to hold the reins. But finally nobody was willing to do so and the camel remained unattended. At this moment the son of Zubayr held the reins, but Mālik al-Ashtar attacked him and threw him down to the ground and grasped his neck.

When the son of Zubayr felt that he was about to be killed at the hands of Mālik, he shouted, 'O people! Set upon Mālik and kill him, even if I am killed too.'

Mālik struck him in the face and let him go, and finally the people scattered from around 'Ā'ishah's camel. Imam 'Alī once again ordered that the camel be hamstrung so as to prevent the enemy from returning to it. Consequently, the camel fell to the ground and the litter was overturned. At this time 'Ā'ishah screamed so loudly that both armies heard her voice. Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr, on the Imam's orders, went to help his sister and untied the straps of the litter. The following conversation also took place between him and his sister.

'Ā'ishah: 'Who are you?'

Muḥammad: 'A member of your family whom you hate the most!'

'Ā'ishah: 'Are you the son of Asmā' Khath'amiya?'

Muḥammad: 'Yes, but she was not inferior to your mother.'

'Ā'ishah: 'That is right; she was a noble woman. By the way, thank God you are unharmed.'

Muḥammad: 'But you did not want me to remain unharmed.'

'Ā'ishah: 'If I had not wanted this, I would not have said so.'

Muḥammad: 'You were desirous of your own victory even at the cost of my life.'

'Ā'ishah: 'I was desirous of victory, but I could not achieve it. I did not want you to be harmed. Now, stop talking about this and do not be a reproacher, since your father was not a reproacher either.'

Imam 'Alī came to the litter and hit it with his spear and told 'Ā'ishah, 'O 'Ā'ishah! Had the Prophet advised you to do what you have done?'

She replied to the Imam, 'O Abū al-Ḥasan! Display forgiveness when you have achieved victory.'

A short time later, 'Ammār and Mālik al-Ashtar also came to the litter. 'Ammār addressed 'Ā'ishah and told her, 'O Mother! Did you notice the valour of your sons and the way they were fighting in the way of their religion today?' 'Ā'ishah pretended not to hear what he was saying and did not reply, because 'Ammār had been a venerable companion of the Prophet and was one of the most senior Muslims.

Then the following conversation took place between al-Ashtar and 'Ā'ishah:

Al-Ashtar: 'Praise be to God, who assisted His imam and humiliated his enemy. "*The truth has come and the falsehood has vanished, for the falsehood is bound to vanish*" (17:81). O mother! What do you think about what you have done?'

'Ā'ishah: 'Who are you? May your mother mourn your death!'

Al-Ashtar: 'I am your son, Mālik al-Ashtar.'

'Ā'ishah: 'You are lying. I am not your mother.'

Al-Ashtar: 'You are my mother whether you like it or not.'

'Ā'ishah: 'Are you the one who wanted to make my sister, Asmā', grieve for her son ['Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr]?'

Al-Ashtar: 'I wanted to do so in order to have an excuse before God [i.e. in order to obey God's command].'

Afterwards, while 'Ā'ishah was getting on a mount, she said, 'You gave rise to honour and glory and achieved victory. The divine destiny is certainly carried out.'

Imam 'Alī told Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr to ask his sister whether she had been hit by any arrows, since the outside of the litter had been struck by so many arrows that it looked liked a porcupine. 'Ā'ishah replied that only one arrow had hit her on the head. Muḥammad told his sister, 'God will judge you guilty on the Day of Judgement, because you are the one who rose up against the Imam and incited the people to revolt against him and disregarded the divine book.'

'Ā'ishah replied to him, 'Leave me alone and ask 'Alī to protect me from harm and injury.'

Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr informed the Imam that his sister had not been harmed. The Imam told him, "Ā'ishah is a woman, and women do not have strong reasoning. Undertake her protection and transfer her to the house of 'Abd Allāh ibn Khalaf, and we will decide what to do with her.'

'Ā'ishah was forgiven by Imam 'Alī and her brother, but she always spoke ill of the Imam and prayed for the divine forgiveness for those who had been killed in the Battle of Jamal.[1]

The Fate of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr

Historians believe that Ṭalḥah was killed at the hands of Marwān ibn Ḥakam. The account given with respect to his death is that when Ṭalḥah noticed that the Nākithīn army had been defeated and was retreating, and that his own life was also in danger, he decided to flee. At this moment Marwān saw him and remembered that Ṭalḥah had played a key role in the murder of 'Uthmān. Therefore, he shot an arrow at Ṭalḥah and fatally wounded him. Ṭalḥah realised that the arrow had been shot from within his own camp. Thus, he ordered his slave to transfer him from that point to some other place immediately. His slave finally took him to one of the ruined dwellings belonging to the tribe of Banī Sa'd. While blood was pouring out of his vein, Ṭalḥah said, 'The blood of no noble man has been wasted like my blood.' He said this and died.

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[1] *Jamal*, pp. 166–198; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 539.

Zubayr is Killed

When Zubayr, the second instigator of the Battle of Jamal, realised that the Nākithīn army had been defeated, he decided to flee to Medina, and in doing so he passed through the tribe whose chief, Aḥnaf ibn Qays, had refrained from taking part in the battle so as to help the Imam. The tribal chief became very angry at Zubayr's dastardly act since, contrary to the principles of morality, Zubayr had made the people victims of his own selfishness and now was trying to escape from the battlefield.

One of Aḥnaf's companions called 'Amr ibn Jarmūz decided to kill Zubayr in revenge for the bloodshed which he had caused. Therefore, he pursued Zubayr, and when the latter stopped midway to say his prayer, 'Amr attacked him from behind and killed him and took his horse and ring and weapon as booty, but spared the young man who was accompanying Zubayr. That young man buried Zubayr in a place called Wādī al-Sibā'.[1]

'Amr ibn Jarmūz returned to Aḥnaf and informed him about the fate of Zubayr. Aḥnaf told him, 'I do not know whether you have done the right thing or not.' Then both went to the Imam. When Imam 'Alī saw Zubayr's sword, he stated, 'This sword had often removed sadness from the Prophet's face.' Then, he sent the sword to 'Ā'ishah.[2] And when the Imam saw Zubayr's dead face, he stated, 'You were the Prophet's companion and enjoyed the ties of kinship with him, but Satan dominated your mind and caused you to end up in this condition.'[3]

The Number of those Killed in the Battle of Jamal

The number of those who were killed in the Battle of Jamal has not been accurately recorded in history, and there are considerable discrepancies between different narrations. Shaykh al-Mufīd writes, 'Some have put the number of those killed at 25,000 while 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr (the instigator of the battle) puts the number at 15,000.' Then, Shaykh al-Mufīd prefers the second estimate and says, 'The prevalent view is that those killed numbered 14,000.'[1]

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[1] *Jamal*, p. 204; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 243–244.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 540; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 235.

[3] *Jamal*, p. 209.

Ṭabarī in his *Ta'rīkh* puts the number of those killed in the Battle of Jamal at 10,000. He points out that half of them were the followers of 'Ā'ishah, and that the others were Imam 'Alī's followers. Then, he refers to another estimate of the number of those killed in the battle, an estimate which is the same as the one quoted above from 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr.[2]

Burial of the Dead

The Battle of Jamal took place on Thursday 10 Jumādā al-Thānī 36 / 4 December 656, but the flames of war died down before sunset[3] when the camel carrying 'Ā'ishah fell to the ground and the litter in which she was sitting overturned, and due to the lack of proper motive, most of the Nākithīn began to flee. Marwān ibn Ḥakam took refuge in a family from the tribe of 'Anzah. The words of the Imam in *Nahj al-Balāghah* indicate that his sons, Imam Ḥasan and Imam Ḥusayn, interceded with him for Marwān. However, interestingly, when they told the Imam that Marwān was ready to pledge allegiance to him, the Imam stated:

> Did he not pledge allegiance to me after the murder of 'Uthmān? I do not need his oath of allegiance, because his hand is the hand of a Jew; if he swears allegiance to me with his hand, he will break it with his back. He will rule only for a short time that a dog takes to lick its nose. He is the father of the four rams, and the *ummah* will suffer a bloody day because of him and his sons.[4]

'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr took refuge in a house belonging to a member of the tribe of Azd and informed 'Ā'ishah about his whereabouts. She asked her brother Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr, who had been ordered by the Imam to protect her, to transfer 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr from his whereabouts to the house of 'Abd Allāh ibn Khalaf where 'Ā'ishah was at that time staying. Finally, both 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr and Marwān were also transferred there.

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[1] Ibid., p. 223.

[2] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 543.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd believes that the battle lasted two days; see vol. 1, p. 262.

[4] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 71. In this, the Imam makes several predictions.

Imam 'Alī spent the rest of the day on the battlefield and called on the people of Basra to bury those from among them who had been killed. According to Ṭabarī, the Imam performed funeral prayers for the Nākithīn from Basra and Kufa who had been killed and also did so for his followers who had been martyred and buried them all in a large grave. Then, he ordered that all the people's possessions be returned to their owners, except the weapons which carried the emblem of the government. The Imam stated, 'It is not permissible for any Muslim to take the belongings of a dead Muslim.'[1]

A number of the Imam's followers were insisting that the Nākithīn be dealt with as idolaters, that is, that those of them who had been captured be taken as slaves and their possessions be shared among the Imam's followers. Imam 'Alī made the following remark with regard to their insistence: 'Which one of you is ready to accept 'Ā'ishah as his share?'[2]

In the following narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq expounds the legal status of this group which is referred to as *bāghī* (insurgent) in Islamic jurisprudence:

> Imam 'Alī fought the people of Basra because of their rebellion and corruption, but he did not take their belongings for the reason that the legal status of an idolater is different from that of an insurgent Muslim; it is permissible for the Islamic army to take the belongings of idolaters, but not those of insurgent Muslims. Indeed, Imam 'Alī granted amnesty to the residents of Basra just as the Prophet granted amnesty to the residents of Mecca.[3]

Imam 'Alī Speaks to the Dead

In the Battle of Badr, the Prophet dropped in a well the bodies of those from the Quraysh who had been killed and then began to speak to them. When he was asked by his companions whether the dead could hear his words, the Prophet told his companions, 'You are not more hearing than they are.'[1]

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 543.

[2] *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 11, Chapter 25 (one of the chapters on jihad).

[3] *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd holds a different view in this regard. He says that the Imam took whatever was on the battlefield and shared it out among his men.

The Commander of the Faithful was walking past those killed in the Battle of Jamal when he saw the body of 'Abd Allāh ibn Khalaf al-Khuzā'ī, who was wearing elegant clothes. The people said that he had been the chief of the Nākithīn, but the Imam stated, 'That is not true; he was a noble and high-minded person.' Then, the Imam saw the body of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Attāb ibn Usayd and stated, 'This man was the pillar of the Nākithīn and their chief.' Then, he continued to walk until he saw the bodies of a group of people from the Quraysh. At this moment, the Imam stated, 'I swear to God that your condition is making us unhappy, but I gave you an ultimatum; still, you were inexperienced youths and were not aware of the results of your action.'

Afterwards, Imam 'Alī saw the body of the judge of Basra, Ka'b ibn Sūr, who had a Qur'an hanging from his neck. The Imam ordered that the Qur'an be taken to a clean place. Then he stated, 'O Ka'b! I found what God had promised me to be correct and unchanging. Did you also find what God had promised to be correct and unchanging?' Then, the Imam further stated, 'You were a man possessing knowledge. I wish you had benefited from your knowledge. But Satan led you astray and caused you to slip and rushed you towards fire.'[2]

When Imam 'Alī saw the body of Ṭalḥah, he stated, 'You had a record in Islam which could be of benefit to you, but Satan led you astray and made you slip, and you rushed towards fire.'[3]

In this part of history, there is nothing recorded except that the Imam condemned the insurgents and described them as 'inhabitants of the fire'. However, the Mu'tazilah school of thought claims that some of these individuals felt remorseful and repented of their deeds before they died. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, one of the most ardent supporters of this school of thought, writes:

> The religious scholars relate that 'Alī told his companions to move Ṭalḥah into a sitting position. Then, he addressed Ṭalḥah and told him: 'It is hard for me to see you covered with dust under the sky and in the heart of this

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 1, p. 639.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 348.

[3] Ibid.

> desert. Was it right that you commit such a thing after your jihad in the way of God and your defence of the Prophet?'
>
> At this moment, a man came to the Imam and told him: 'I was beside Ṭalḥah when he was hit by a stray arrow and sought assistance from me. He asked me who I was. I said that I was one of the followers of the Commander of the Faithful. He told me: "Give me your hand so that I will pledge allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful through you." Then he shook my hand and swore allegiance.'
>
> When the Imam heard what the man said, he stated: 'God wanted to take Ṭalḥah to paradise after he had pledged allegiance to me.'[1]

This is nothing but a fiction. Was Ṭalḥah not cognizant of the Imam's status and his personality and truthfulness? This kind of penitence relates to those who remain in ignorance for a while and then tear the veil of ignorance and observe the truth, but Ṭalḥah could distinguish between the truth and the falsehood from the first day. Besides, supposing this story is true, Ṭalḥah's repentance was useless according to the holy Qur'an: '*But [acceptance of] repentance is not for those who go on committing misdeeds; when death approaches any of them, he says, "I repent now". Nor is it for those who die while they are faithless. For such We have prepared a painful punishment*' (4:18).

Apart from this, could Ṭalḥah's mere oath of allegiance to the Imam absolve him from his sins? He, in cooperation with Zubayr and the Mother of the Faithful, had caused great bloodshed in Basra and on the battlefield, and even a group of people had been slaughtered like sheep on their orders. Such attempts by those having a superficial knowledge are the result of a prejudice in favour of the Prophet's companions and are aimed at portraying them all as fair and just individuals.

The Fall of Basra, the Dispatch of Letters, and the Transfer of ʿĀ'ishah to Medina

The news about the probability of a military confrontation between Imam ʿAlī's army and the Nākithīn of Basra was disseminated in the Islamic lands by the trade caravans that were constantly traversing the deserts of Iraq, Hejaz, and Syria. Consequently, the Muslims and, especially, supporters of the caliph ʿUthmān, were waiting for the news of the upcoming events, and any report of defeat or victory was of momentous significance for each side. For this reason, after ordering the burial of the dead and inspecting the battlefield and giving instructions on the transfer of some captives, the Imam returned to his tent and summoned his secretary ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfiʿ and dictated a number of letters to him. The letters had been addressed to the people of Medina and Kufa, the two sensitive regions of the Islamic world in those days. Imam ʿAlī also sent a letter to his sister, Umm Hānī, the daughter of Abū Ṭālib. By dispatching those letters, the Imam made his friends happy and caused the opportunist elements to abandon any thought of opposition.

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[1] Ibid.

Shaykh al-Mufīd has included the entire text of all of the letters in his book,[1] but Ṭabarī has included, from among all letters, only a very short part of the Imam's letter to the people of Kufa in his *Ta'rīkh*. Because Ṭabarī trusted the writings of Sayf ibn ʿUmar in this part of his book, he has not done justice to the subject for the most part and has simply disregarded the sensitive matters.

In the Imam's letter to the people of Kufa (as narrated by Ṭabarī), the date of the military confrontation is mentioned as the middle of Jumādā al-Thānī 36 / 9 December 656, and the place of the confrontation is referred to as a location called Khuraybah.

Anyhow, Imam ʿAlī finally left Khuraybah for Basra on a Monday. When the Imam arrived at the mosque of Basra, he said a two-*rakʿah* prayer. Then he went straight to the house of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Khalaf al-Khuzāʿī, which was the largest house in Basra and in which ʿĀ'ishah was being protected. ʿAbd Allāh had been the scribe of the governor's court in Basra at the time when ʿUmar was the caliph. As was mentioned above, he and his brother, ʿUthmān, were killed in the Battle of Jamal. Some say that he had lived at the time of the prophetic mission and had seen the Prophet,[2] although this cannot be verified.

When Imam ʿAlī arrived at the house of ʿAbd Allāh, his wife Ṣafiyyah, the daughter of Ḥārith ibn Ṭalḥah ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, was wailing and weeping. ʿAbd Allāh's wife affronted the Imam and called him 'murderer of friends' (*qātil al-aḥibbah*) and 'disperser of the assembly' (*mufarriq al-jamʿ*), but the Imam did not respond to her. Then he entered ʿĀ'ishah's room and greeted her and sat beside her. The Imam told 'Ā'ishah about Ṣafiyyah's affront. Later, also, when the Imam was leaving the house of 'Abd Allāh, Ṣafiyyah repeated her affront. At this moment the Imam's companions lost their patience and threatened 'Abd Allāh's wife, but the Imam prevented them from committing any violent acts. He told his companions, 'Let me never hear about acts of violence against women.'

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[1] *Jamal*, pp. 211, 213.

[2] *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 2, p. 152.

The Imam's Speech in Basra

After leaving the house of 'Abd Allāh, Imam 'Alī went to the centre of Basra, and the people of Basra who were waving different flags renewed their allegiance to him. Even the injured and those who had somehow been granted safety once again swore allegiance to the Imam.[1] It was necessary for the Imam to make the people of Basra aware of the profundity of their crime and the ugliness of their deed. Therefore, while he was surrounded with an aura of grandeur and brightness and while the people of Basra were all ears, the Imam made the following address:

> You were the soldiers of that woman and the followers of that camel. When it grumbled, you responded, and when it was hamstrung, you fled. Your character is low and your pledge is treachery and your faith is hypocrisy and your water is brackish. Whoever resides in your city will be ensnared in the trap of your sins, and whoever keeps himself apart from you will enjoy divine mercy. It seems to me that the divine punishment is coming to you from the sky and the earth, and I suppose that you have all been drowned, and only the top of your mosque, like the hull of a ship, can be seen above water.[2]

The Imam then told the people of Basra: 'Your land is close to water and a long away from the sky. Your minds are light and your thoughts are foolish. You are a target for the archers and a tasty mouthful for the scroungers and a prey for the predators [because of the weakness of your wills].'[3] Imam 'Alī further stated, 'O inhabitants of Basra! Now what do you think about me?'

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 545.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 130.

[3] Ibid., Sermon 514.

At this moment, a man stood up and said, 'Nothing except that you will treat us with kindness and beneficence. If you punish us, you have done the right thing because we are guilty, and if you forgive us, forgiveness is more pleasing to God.'

When the Imam heard what the man said, he stated, 'I forgave you all. Do not get involved in sedition and conspiracy. You are the first individuals who reneged on their pledge of allegiance and broke the staff of the *ummah* in two. Repent of your sin and express sincere penitence.'[1]

Good Intention can Substitute for Action

At this moment, one of the Imam's followers said, 'I wish my brother had been here to witness your victories over your enemies and have a share in the virtue and spiritual reward of jihad.' The Imam asked him, 'Did your brother sympathise with our cause?' He answered in the affirmative. Then, the Imam stated:

> Indeed, your brother was also present in our army and took part in this battle [and, like other combatants, has a share in its reward]. Not only your brother, but those who are still in the loins of their fathers and the wombs of their mothers, and who will soon emerge and strengthen the faith also have a share in the virtue and spiritual reward of this jihad.[2]

The above statement highlights a fundamental principle in the field of education and training, the principle that good and evil intentions can substitute for the action itself as far as reward and punishment are concerned. This principle is emphasised in other parts of *Nahj al-Balāghah* as well. For instance, it is underlined in the following statement:

> O people! Indeed, what brings individuals together [under one banner] is their satisfaction with, or anger at, an action. The female camel of the tribe of Thamūd had been hamstrung by only one person, but the divine punishment was meted out to the whole tribe because every member of the tribe had expressed satisfaction with what that person had done.[3]

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[1] *Jamal*, p. 218.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 12.

[3] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 196.

Distribution of Public Funds

Imam 'Alī's soldiers did not take anything as booty in the Battle of Jamal, and their fighting was purely for the sake of God. Since the Imam had returned possessions to their owners, except enemy weapons, he had to distribute public funds among his soldiers. When the Imam saw the wealth stored in the treasury, he clapped his hands and stated, 'Go and allure someone else.' There were some 600,000 dirhams in the treasury which the Imam distributed among his soldiers, each one receiving 500 dirhams. At the end of the distribution, there were 500 dirhams left which the Imam allotted to himself. At this moment, a man suddenly came up to the Imam and claimed that he had also taken part in the battle, but that his name had been left out. Imam 'Alī gave that remaining 500 dirhams to the man and stated, 'Thank God I did not allot any of this wealth to myself.'[1]

The Transfer of 'Ā'ishah to Medina

'Ā'ishah was held in high esteem because of her relation to the Prophet. The Imam provided the means of her journey, including a mount and provisions, and told Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr to accompany her sister to Medina. He also allowed those of his followers that were from Medina and eager to return there to go back with 'Ā'ishah to Medina. Besides, the Imam assigned forty respectable women of Basra to keep her company on the journey to Medina.

The 1 Rajab 36 / 24 December 656, which was a Saturday, was determined as the day of departure. When 'Ā'ishah was leaving Basra, a group of people saw her off and bid farewell to her. 'Ā'ishah was deeply affected when she noticed the kindness and beneficence of the Imam, and thus she told the people, 'My children! Some of us argue with others, but this does not result in transgression. I swear to God that what took place between me and 'Alī was nothing more than what occurs between a woman and her relatives. Although he became the target for my wrath and disfavour, he is among the righteous and the virtuous.'

Imam 'Alī thanked 'Ā'ishah for her remarks and reminded the people that she was the wife of their prophet. Then, he saw her off accompanying her for a few miles.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 547.

Shaykh al-Mufīd writes:

> Those forty women who had been told by the Imam to accompany 'Ā'ishah had disguised themselves as men so that strangers would not realise that they were women and in order that evil thoughts would not occur to anybody about them and the Prophet's wife. 'Ā'ishah also supposed that the Imam had assigned a number of men to protect her and was continuously complaining about this. When she got to Medina and realised that they were women disguised as men, she felt sorry about her complaints. She said: 'May God reward the son of Abū Ṭālib for showing consideration for the Prophet's sanctity and treating me with respect.'[1]

The Appointment of Governors

At the time when 'Uthmān was the caliph, the affairs of the province of Egypt were handled by 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Sarḥ, whose evil and disgraceful deeds formed a major factor contributing to the Egyptians' uprising against the caliph and also led to his expulsion from Egypt. At that time, Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfah was in Egypt. He was always criticising the governor of Egypt and the caliph. When the Egyptians left their province for Medina with the intention of censuring the caliph, they entrusted the task of handling the affairs of Egypt to Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfah, and he remained in this position until Imam 'Alī appointed Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Abādah as governor of the province of Egypt.

According to Ṭabarī, Qays was dispatched to Egypt in the year in which the Battle of Jamal occurred, but some historians, including Ibn Athīr,[2] believe that Qays went to Egypt in the month of Ṣafar. If they mean Ṣafar 36 / August 656, Qays must have been sent to Egypt before the outbreak of the battle. But if they mean the month of Ṣafar 37 / July 657, then he must have gone there six months or so after the battle. Still, according to Ṭabarī, Qays was dispatched to Egypt in the year 36 AH / 656 CE, the year in which the Battle of Jamal took place.

Anyhow, the Imam appointed Khalīd ibn Qarrah al-Yarbū'ī as governor of Khurāsān and Ibn 'Abbās as governor of Basra and then decided to leave Basra for Kufa. But before he did so, he dispatched Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bijillī to Syria to negotiate with Mu'āwiyah so that the latter would announce his obedience to the central government, which was headed by the Imam.[1]

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[1] *Jamal*, p. 221.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 268.

Because of the great significance that was attached to Basra, where Satan had gained a foothold, the Imam appointed Ibn 'Abbās as governor, Ziyād ibn Abīhi as tribute collector, and Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī as their assistant.[2] When introducing Ibn 'Abbās to the people of Basra, Imam 'Alī made a very witty and interesting speech which is quoted by Shaykh al-Mufīd in his book.[3]

Ṭabarī writes, 'The Imam told Ibn 'Abbās to subdue those who rise up against you and disobey your orders with the help of those who are obedient to you.'[4]

When Imam 'Alī was leaving the land of Basra, he gave thanks to God: 'Praised be God, who let me out of the wickedest of all cities.'

Thus, the first rebellion during the Imam's caliphate came to an end, and the Imam left for Kufa in order to plan a confrontation with Mu'āwiyah and make the vast Islamic territory free from corrupt and self-interested elements.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 546–560.

[2] *Jamal*, p. 324.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 546.

11

Kufa: The Centre of the Islamic Caliphate

The sun of Islam rose in the land of Mecca and after a lapse of thirteen years appeared in the sky of Yathrib (Medina) and after ten years of shining set in Medina. It opened up new horizons for the people of the Arabian peninsula and caused the land of Hejaz, especially the city of Medina, to be known as the religious centre and the pivot of politics.

Following the demise of the Prophet, the selection of the caliph by the Migrants and the Helpers required that Medina be the seat of the Islamic caliphate. Thus, the caliphs managed the affairs of the state by dispatching agents and governors to the different parts of the Islamic realm and propagated Islam by conquering new territories and removing obstacles and barriers.

The Commander of the Faithful, who had been designated and named by the Prophet as his successor and also selected by the Migrants and the Helpers as caliph, was also naturally expected to choose Medina as the seat of the Islamic caliphate like the former caliphs and manage the affairs of the state from there. This is what he did at the beginning of his caliphate, and through correspondence and the dispatch of competent individuals and the dismissal of those greedily pursuing riches and the delivering of moving and impressive sermons he handled the affairs of the Islamic community. Consequently, the Islamic system, which had undergone certain deviations and aberrations since Abū Bakr had been chosen as caliph twenty-five years earlier, was being reformed when suddenly the issue of the Nākithīn, namely the treachery of those who had been the first to swear allegiance to the Imam, came up. The shocking reports which reached the Imam indicated that the Nākithīn, financially supported by the Umayyad clan and benefiting from the influence wielded by the Prophet's wife and the esteem in which she was held, had conquered the south of Iraq and, following the capture of Basra, had unfairly slaughtered tens of the Imam's followers and aides.

This incident prompted the Imam to take action to punish the Nākithīn and their accomplices, and thus he left Medina for Basra with his army and dismounted in the vicinity of Basra. A war broke out between the Imam's army, the rightful side, and the Nākithīn army, the side having an invalid claim. Finally, the rightful side achieved victory and the leaders of the insurgents were killed and a group of them fled and Basra was once again part of the Islamic territory and the handling of its affairs was entrusted to the Imam's companions, and the condition of the city and its inhabitants returned to normal. Ibn 'Abbās, the interpreter of the Qur'an and the Imam's eminent disciple, was appointed governor of the province of Basra.

The apparent conditions required that Imam 'Alī return to Medina, the Prophet's burial place, and, acting in consultation with a group of the Prophet's followers and companions, set out to disseminate the Islamic teachings and cure the ill health of the community and dispatch soldiers to the remote areas so as to expand the sphere of influence of the Islamic government and handle other affairs related to the caliphate and avoid any kind of conflict or confrontation. But this was what the situation seemed to be, and any superficial person would have expected the Imam to do what was mentioned above, especially in view of the fact that Medina in those days was endowed with a certain sanctity and spirituality because it was the real cradle of Islam and the Prophet's burial place and the base of the Prophet's companions from among the Migrants and the Helpers who were responsible for selecting and deposing the caliph.

Still, Imam 'Alī left for Kufa with the intention of staying there for a while. There were two reasons for this decision, which the Imam made following consultation with his companions.[1]

1. Although Imam 'Alī had departed from Medina with a large number of followers, and despite the fact that a number of groups had also joined him midway, the residents of Kufa and its suburbs constituted the majority of the Imam's soldiers and devotees. The reason for this was that the Imam had sought assistance from the people of Kufa, which was an

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (Ḥalab edition), p. 85.

important city in Iraq, through 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, a senior companion of the Prophet, and his honourable son, Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā, with the intention of subduing the Nākithīn. Consequently, a very large number of people from that region responded to the Imam's call and left for the battlefield with the Imam's envoys.[1] However, a group of people such as Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī and his like-minded individuals refused to extend any kind of assistance and tried to dissuade others from going to the battlefield through their words and deeds.

When Imam 'Alī achieved victory against the Nākithīn and routed the enemy, he felt bound by a sense of gratitude to visit the homes and dwellings of these people and express his appreciation to the ones who had responded to his call and joined his army and reproach and censure those who had refused to take part in the jihad.

2. Imam 'Alī was well aware of the fact that the rebellion of the Nākithīn had been instigated by Mu'āwiyah, who had encouraged them to break their oath of allegiance and deceitfully sworn allegiance to them in their absence, who had even delineated the uprising in a letter that he had sent to Zubayr and informed him that he had gained the pledge of allegiance for him from the people of Syria, and who had told Ṭalḥah and Zubayr to capture Kufa and Basra as soon as possible and pretend that they were seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān and not allow the son of Abū Ṭālib to take control of those cities.

But now this outlaw had failed in his attempt and the rebellion had come to an end; thus, it was necessary to remove the root of corruption and cut this branch of the accursed Umayyad tree off the body of the Islamic community as soon as possible. The closest city to Syria was Kufa. Besides, Iraq was a region from which quite a few of the Imam's devotees had emanated, and they had joined the Imam's army. This is why the Imam relied more on this region than on other regions. Imam 'Alī himself refers to this point in one of his sermons: 'I swear to God I did not come to you willingly, but I did so out of necessity.'[1]

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[1] Mas'ūdī puts the number of people from Kufa who joined the Imam's army at 7,000 or, according to another narration, at 6,560 (see *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 368). Ya'qūbī also puts the number at 6,000 (see Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 182). Ibn 'Abbās says: 'When we dismounted in Dhī Qār, I told the Imam that very few people had come from Kufa to assist him. The Imam stated, "The exact number of those who will come to help me is 6,560." I was surprised at their exact number and decided to count them when they arrived. We had stayed in Dhī Qār for 15 days when we heard the whinnies of the horses and mules, and the army from Kufa arrived. I counted them carefully and noticed that their exact number was what the Imam had stated. I said to myself: "God is the Greatest! I believe in God and the divine mission of His messenger"' (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 187).

It was for these two reasons that the Imam decided to choose Kufa as his dwelling place and transfer the seat of the Islamic caliphate from Medina to Iraq. Therefore, on 12 Rajab 36 / 4 January 657, which was a Monday, Imam 'Alī arrived in Kufa while accompanied by a group of elders of Basra. The people of Kufa headed by the Qur'an reciters and the city's prominent personalities welcomed the Imam and greeted him. As regards the Imam's place of residence, the governor's court had been chosen for this purpose, and they asked the Imam to allow them to lodge him there. But the Imam refused to reside at the governor's court, which used to be the centre of deviation and oppression, and told them that the palace was the centre of corruption. Finally, the Imam dwelled in the house of Ja'dah ibn Hubayrah al-Makhzūmī, the nephew of Umm Hānī daughter of Abū Ṭālib.[2]

Imam 'Alī called on the people of Kufa to assemble in a place called Raḥbah, which was a wide expanse of land, so that he could talk to them, and he himself dismounted there. First, the Imam said a two-*rak'ah* prayer at a mosque which was there. Then, he mounted the pulpit and praised God and sent greetings to His prophet and made the following address to the people:

> O people of Kufa! You possess a special virtue from the viewpoint of Islam, provided that you do not change it. I invited you to the truth, and you answered my call. You first acted wrongly, but then you rectified your deed. You are the exemplars of those who answer your call and follow you.
>
> The worst of things that I worry might beset you are two: indulging whims and desires and nurturing too many hopes. Indulging desires diverts one from the truth, and nurturing too many hopes makes one forget about the hereafter. Be aware that this world has turned its back and is going away from you, and that the hereafter has set off and is approaching you, and each of these two has its own children. You be the children of the

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 70.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 8.

> hereafter. Today is the time of action, not reckoning, and tomorrow will be the time of reckoning, not action.
>
> Praised be God, who helped His friend and degraded the enemy and dignified the rightful and veracious one and abased the reneger and wrongdoer. You are expected to exercise virtue and piety and obey the one who has obeyed the Prophet's household, since members of this household are superior to, and more qualified than, those claiming to be related to Islam and the Prophet and laying claim to the caliphate in being obeyed. These individuals are opposing us and seeking superiority over us through the virtues which they have obtained from us and are denying our status and right. They will be punished for their sins and will soon face the consequence of their aberration in the hereafter.
>
> Be aware that a group of you refused to assist me, and I blame and reproach them. Do not associate with them and turn your ears away from what they say to placate the people, so that the party of God will be distinguished from the party of Satan.[1]

Justness in the Appointment of Governors

The Imam's mild attitude towards the Kūfīs who did not take up arms displeased a number of extremist revolutionaries. For this reason, Mālik ibn Ḥabīb al-Yarbū'ī, the head of guard under the Imam, stood up and said complainingly, 'I consider this punishment to be too lenient. I swear by God that if you order me, I will kill them.' The Imam admonished him with the sentence 'Glorified is God!' and told him, 'Ḥabīb! You exceeded the limit.'

Ḥabīb once again stood up and said, 'Being severe and exceeding the limit are more effective than mildness and lenience towards the enemies in preventing deplorable incidents.'

Imam 'Alī tried to enlighten Ḥabīb with his sound reasoning and told him, 'God has not given such an order. Men will be killed only if they have killed other men; so what is the reason for oppression and transgression? Almighty God states: "*and whoever is killed wrongfully, We have certainly given his heir an authority. But let him not commit any excess in killing, for*

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[1] Ibid., vol. 3; *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), sermons 27 & 41. Shaykh al-Mufīd in *Irshād* (p. 124) has not narrated the first part of this sermon.

he enjoys the support [*of law*]" (17:33). Going to extremes in slaying is to kill someone who has not committed murder in place of the murderer.'

The Open Political Environment

The disobedient elements of Kufa who witnessed the conversation between Imam 'Alī and the head of guard noticed the Imam's justice and saw that there existed an open political environment. Thus, they elaborated on the reasons for their disobedience.

1. One of the disobedient elements, Abū Burdah ibn 'Awf, stood up and shed light on the reason for his not joining the Imam's army by asking a question about those who had been killed in the Battle of Jamal. He asked the Imam, 'Did you see the slain ones around the bodies of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr? Why were they killed?' Imam 'Alī expounded on the reason for that and thus acquired the trust of the questioner in his course of action. He told the man, 'They put to the sword my followers and the officials of my government and killed such a personality as Rabī'ah 'Abdī in addition to a group of Muslims. They were killed only because they had told the treacherous aggressors that, unlike them, they would not break their oath of allegiance, and that they would not act deceitfully towards their Imam. And I asked the Nākithīn to turn in the killers of the government officials so that they would be punished and the divine book would then arbitrate between us. They refused to turn over the killers and waged war against me, despite the fact that they were bound by their oath of allegiance to me, and spilled the blood of nearly 1,000 of my devotees. Therefore, in order to punish the killers and subdue the Nākithīn, I fought against them and crushed their rebellion.' Then, the Imam added, 'Do you have any doubt about this?' The questioner said, 'I was in doubt about your rightfulness, but what you stated revealed to me the wrongness of their actions, and I realised that you are guided and insightful.'[1]

Which political environment could be more open than the one in which an individual who had refused to take part in the jihad expressed the reason for his refusal, which was doubt about the rightfulness of the ruling system, in the form of a question among a group of companions and followers of Imam ʿAlī and received the answer to his question? Although the questioner had been a supporter of ʿUthmān before he joined the Imam's camp, and although he later took part in a battle in the company of the Imam, he had a secret relationship with Muʿāwiyah. For this reason, when Muʿāwiyah took control of Iraq after the Imam's martyrdom, he was given a vast piece of land in the Fallūjah region in return for his sycophantic service to Muʿāwiyah.[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 104; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 4–5.

2. Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad al-Khuzāʿī, one of the Prophet's companions, was among those who did not support Imam ʿAlī in the Battle of Jamal and refused to take part in this battle. When he called on the Imam he was rebuked by him and was told, 'You were in doubt about the rightfulness of my course of action and refused to join my army, whereas I considered you to be the most honest person and the first to assist me. What prevented you from helping the household of your prophet and discouraged you from assisting them?'

Sulaymān apologised to the Imam in utter embarrassment and said, 'Do not talk about what has happened, and do not reproach me for that. Preserve my affection and amity, for I shall assist you wholeheartedly. The trouble is not over yet, and there are still more incidents ahead, the incidents in which you will distinguish between your friends and foes.'

Contrary to Sulaymān's expectation, Imam ʿAlī remained silent in the face of his apology and did not say anything. Sulaymān sat there for a while; then he rose and went to Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā and told him, 'Are you not surprised at the Imam's rebuke?' Imam ʿAlī's son kindly replied, 'The one who is looked to for fellowship and assistance is rebuked more.' At this moment, the venerable companion of the Prophet predicted that there would be more rebellions against Imam ʿAlī and pointed out that at the time of those rebellions, sincere and honest individuals like him would be needed more than ever. He told Imam al-Mujtabā, 'There are incidents ahead in which the enemy's spears will come together and the swords will be unsheathed, and in those incidents the likes of me will be needed more than ever. Do not regard my conciliatory words as deceit and trickery and do not impugn my benevolence.' In response to him, Imam al-Mujtabā stated, 'May God have mercy upon you. We would never dispute your motives.'[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 104.

From that time on, Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad did not desist from defending the Prophet's household. He took part in the Battle of Ṣiffīn in the company of Imam 'Alī and slew a Syrian hero by the name of Ḥawshab on the battlefield. Following the death of Mu'āwiyah, he wrote a letter to Imam Ḥusyan inviting him to Iraq. Although he neglected to assist the Imam in the land of Karbalā', he rose in revolt along with a large group called the Tawwābīn, whose members numbered around 4,000, in order to make up for his failure and take revenge on the murderers of the Imam. In 65 AH in a region called 'Ayn Abū Wardah, he fought against a large army that had been sent from Syria and drank from the cup of martyrdom.[2]

3. Muḥammad ibn Mikhnaf says:

> After Imam 'Alī's arrival in Kufa, my father and I called on the Imam at a time when he was addressing a group of prominent personalities and tribal chiefs of Iraq who had all refused to take part in the jihad against the Nākithīn. The Imam was reproaching and telling them, 'Why did you, as chiefs of your tribes, step backwards? If it was because of the weakness of intention, you have all incurred a loss, and if you were in doubt about my rightfulness and for this reason refused to assist me, you are all my enemies.' They began to speak, saying that they were friendly to the Imam's friends and hostile to his enemies. Then, each one of them tried to justify his failure to join the Imam's army by offering a certain excuse such as having been ill or having been away on a journey. Imam 'Alī kept silent in the face of their apologies but expressed his appreciation for the services of my father and our tribe and stated: 'Mikhnaf ibn Salīm and his tribe are not like the group described by the Qur'an as follows: "Among you is indeed he who drags his feet, and should an affliction visit you, he says, 'It was certainly God's blessing that I did not accompany them!' But should a grace from God come to you, he will surely say, as if there were no affection between you and him, '*I wish I were with them so that I had achieved a great success*!' (4:73)"'

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[1] Ibid., p. 106; *Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilā'*.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 3, pp. 101–102.

Finally, through this questioning and through the acceptance of the apologies or keeping silent towards them, Imam 'Alī made it known that although they had been forgiven and their apologies accepted this time, their action was not to be repeated in the future. If the Imam had not blamed and rebuked them to such an extent as he did, this group would probably have continued with its violation in the future as well.

The Imam's First Friday Prayer Sermon in Kufa

After his arrival in Kufa, Imam 'Alī decided to reside there permanently and thus said his four-*rak'ah* prayers in full. On the following Friday, he said his Friday prayer with the people of Kufa. In one of the sermons of the prayer, he praised God and sent greetings to His prophet and made the following address to the people:

> I call upon you to observe piety, since piety is the best thing that God has urged upon His servants and is the best means of acquiring divine satisfaction and is the cause of salvation before God. You have been ordered to observe piety, and you have been created to exercise benevolence and obey God.
>
> Do everything for the sake of God with no intention of pretence or fame-seeking. Whoever does something for the sake of anyone other than God will be entrusted by God to the one for the sake of whom he has worked, and whoever does something for the sake of God will be rewarded by God. Fear divine punishment, for He has not created you in vain. God is aware of your actions and has ordained your life span. Do not be deceived by the world, since it misleads the worldly. And deceived is the one who has been deluded by the world. The hereafter is the abode of real existence, if only people realised. I pray to God to bestow upon me the status of martyrs and association with prophets and the life of fortunate people.[1]

The Dispatch of Governors

After residing in Kufa, the Commander of the Faithful dispatched pious and qualified officials to those regions of the Islamic territory to which he had not yet sent governors. History has accurately recorded the names of those governors and the provinces to which they were dispatched.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 14; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 108.

Among those governors was Khulayd ibn Qurrah, who was sent by the Imam to Khurāsān. When he arrived in Nayshābūr, he was informed that the progeny of Khusraw II, who were then living in Kabul, had incited the people of there to oppose and rise up against the Islamic government. Khulayd crushed the rebels with the forces that were under his command and also captured a number of them and sent them to Kufa.[2]

The dispatch of governors to different regions helped to establish Imam ʿAlī's rule throughout the Islamic territories, but Muʿāwiyah's opposition in the Syrian region remained a source of trouble and thus had to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Before this part of the history of Imam ʿAlī's rule is elaborated, an interesting event that occurred in Kufa will be mentioned here.

In the course of his contacts with the people of Iraq, Imam ʿAlī came across a group of them who had long been ruled by members of the Sassanian dynasty. The Imam asked them about the number of Sassanian kings who had ruled them, and they replied that they had been ruled by thirty-two members of the Sassanian dynasty. The Imam asked about the behaviour of those kings and the way they ruled. They replied, 'They all ruled in the same way, but the king who was the son of Hurmuz adopted a particular manner. He appropriated the country's wealth and opposed our elders. He destroyed what was in the people's interests and promoted his own interests. He degraded the general public and angered the people of Persia. The public rose up against him and killed him. His wives became widows and his children orphans.' In reply to their spokesman who was called Narsā, the Imam made the following statement: 'God created men justly and will be pleased with them only if they act according to justice. In the divine kingdom there is a reminder in what has been bestowed by God, the reminder that the dominion will have no order and stability without management, and that a government should certainly exist. We will achieve unity and concord only if the living generations do not speak ill of the deceased. Therefore, whenever the living generations spoke ill of the deceased and opposed their right policies, they were destroyed and annihilated by others as well.' Then, Imam 'Alī appointed Narsā, who was their elder, as their chief.[1]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 14–15; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 108; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 233.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 12.

The Imam's Letters to some Governors

After Imam 'Alī arrived in Kufa and dispatched a number of governors to different regions, he was mostly preoccupied with Mu'āwiyah's rebellion and was always thinking of removing this cancerous tumour from the body of the Islamic community. However, the positions of some governors and their faithfulness towards the Imam were not so clear, as they had not yet expressed their pledge of allegiance and also that of the people of their regions to the Imam. Therefore, Imam 'Alī wrote letters to a number of governors whose mandates had been given to them by the third caliph asking them to clarify their positions and announce their pledge of allegiance as well as that of the people of their regions.[2]

Among the letters written by the Imam, two carry greater significance. The first was written to the governor of Hamadān, Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bijillī, and the second was written to the governor of Azerbaijan, Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindī. The following are the summaries of the two letters.

The Imam's Letter to the Governor of Hamadān

> God does not change the condition of a community unless they ameliorate their moral condition. I shall inform you about the conduct of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, who broke their pledge of allegiance and did great harm to my governor, 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf. I left Medina accompanied by the Migrants and the Helpers. Midway, at a point called 'Adhīb, I ordered my son Ḥasan and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir and Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Abādah to go to Kufa and call upon the people to join the Islamic army in order to subdue the Nākithīn. They did so, and the people of Kufa complied. I dismounted near Basra and regarded the leaders of the rebellion as excusable and overlooked their offence and once again asked them to affirm their pledge of allegiance to me. But they settled for nothing except war. Thus, I sought assistance from God

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[1] Ibid., p. 14.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 141.

> and entered into conflict with them. A number of them were killed and a group of them fled from the battlefield to Basra. Then, they asked me what I had asked them before the outbreak of the war, so I wished them good health and soundness, and peace and quiet took the place of war. I appointed 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās as governor of Basra and then departed for Kufa. I am sending this letter to you through Zaḥr ibn Qays. Ask him whatever question you have.[1]

In this letter, and also in another letter written to Ash'ath, the Imam tried to clarify the reason for his confrontation with the two elders of the Quraysh and the two renowned companions of the Prophet (i.e. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr), so that the Islamic community would know that the two first swore allegiance to the Imam, but then by breaking their oath of allegiance disrupted social order and gave rise to turbulence and rebellion.

When the governor of Hamadān received the Imam's letter, he stood up among the people and said: 'O people! This is a letter from the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He is a trustworthy person with respect to religious and worldly affairs, and we are thankful to God for his victory over his enemies. O people! Those who were the first to embrace Islam, including the Migrants and the Helpers and the Tābi'ūn [followers of the Prophet's companions], pledged allegiance to him, and if the caliph had been elected from among the people, he would have been the most qualified person for this position. O people! Survival lies in union, and annihilation and destruction lie in schism and separation. 'Alī will lead you justly as long as you adhere to justice, and if you deviate from it, he will direct you to the right path.' When the people heard their governor's remarks, they said that they would obey the Imam, and that they were all pleased with his rule. Afterwards, the governor wrote a letter to Imam 'Alī expressing his obedience and that of the people of his province to the Imam.[2]

Zaḥr ibn Qays, the carrier of the Imam's letter, stood up and made an eloquent speech. He said:

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 19–20; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 70–71; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 82.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 16; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 71–72.

> O people! The Migrants and the Helpers pledged allegiance to 'Alī because of his impeccability as well as his knowledge of the divine book and the right path. But Ṭalḥah and Zubayr broke their oath of allegiance unjustifiably. They not only called on the people to rise in revolt, but they also instigated a war.[1]

The allegiance pledged by the governor of Hamadān and the people of the western region of Persia strengthened the pillar of the Imam's government. Shortly afterwards, the governor departed for Kufa with the intention of winning the Imam's support and confidence.

The Imam's Letter to Ash'ath, the Governor of Azerbaijan

Ash'ath ibn Qays had strong ties with the former caliph, as his daughter was 'Uthmān's daughter-in-law (i.e. she was the wife of 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān). Imam 'Alī sent a letter to him through one of his Hamdāni[2] followers by the name of Ziyād ibn Marḥab.[3] The letter read as follows:

> If you did not possess certain traits, you would have acted by now to gain pledges of allegiance for me. If you exercise piety, you will be led by certain things to express the truth. As you know, people swore allegiance to me, but Ṭalḥah and Zubayr later broke their oath of allegiance to me and took the Mother of the Faithful from her house to Basra. I rushed to them and asked them to revert to their pledge of allegiance, but they did not accept. I insisted, but my insistence proved futile...[4]

Then Imam 'Alī, addressing Ash'ath, made a historic statement:

> Governorship is not a tasty mouthful for you, but it is a trust. With you are funds belonging to God, and you are one of God's treasurers with respect to those funds until you hand them over to me. Bear in mind that I shall not be a harsh ruler towards you as long as you exercise honesty.[5]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 17–18; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 82–83.

[2] The tribe of Hamdān is one of the famous tribes of Yemen, and members of this tribe were very sincere and steadfast in their devotion to the Imam.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 83: Ziyād ibn Ka'b.

[4] Ibid., p. 83; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 20–21.

[5] According to what has been stated in *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn* by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim, Sayyid al-Raḍī has omitted part of the beginning of the letter (see *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 5). Ibn 'Abd Rabbih in *'Iqd al-Farīd* (vol. 3, p. 104) and Ibn Qutaybah in *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (vol. 1,

Although both letters had been written at the same time, the tone of the first letter was quite mild while the second letter had a pungent and critical tone. The reason for this difference in tone was that the two governors had different mentalities. Ash'ath was not so willing to introduce the Imam to the people and gain the pledge of allegiance for him from them. Hence, when he received the Imam's letter, instead of rising and introducing 'Alī and obtaining the pledge of allegiance for him from the people, like the governor of Hamadān, he kept silent. Consequently, Ziyād ibn Marḥab, the Imam's envoy and the carrier of his letter, stood up and told the people about the murder of 'Uthmān and the treachery of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. He said:

> O people! The one who is not convinced by a few words will not be convinced by many words either. The incident relating to 'Uthmān is not the kind of matter about which talk will convince you, but of course the one who hears about an incident is not like the one who witnessed it. O people! Be informed that following the murder of 'Uthmān, the Migrants and the Helpers swore allegiance to 'Alī, but those two [i.e. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr] broke their pledge of allegiance with no reason. Finally, God made 'Alī heir to the earth, and the good end is for the righteous.[1]

At this moment, Ash'ath had no alternative but to express his obedience – most reluctantly and through a very short remark – to a ruler who had been chosen by the Migrants and the Helpers. He stood up and said:

> O people! 'Uthmān appointed me governor of this province [i.e. Azerbaijan]. He died while I was holding this position, and people pledged allegiance to 'Alī, and we shall obey him as we obeyed the former caliphs. You heard about what had happened between him and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, and 'Alī is worthy of trust with respect to those things that are concealed from us.[2]

The governor concluded his remarks and entered his home. Then he summoned his confidants and told them, 'I have been frightened by

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p. 83) have included a summary of what has been narrated by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim (see *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 202; Ibn Maytham, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 350).

[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 21; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 83.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

ʿAlī's letter. He will take Azerbaijan's wealth away from me, so I think I had better join Muʿāwiyah.' However, the governor's advisors reproached him and said, 'Death is better for you than doing this. Are you going to leave your land and tribe and follow the Syrians?' Ashʿath accepted the view of his advisors and departed for Kufa in order to improve relations.'[1]

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[1] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 83–84; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 21.

12

The Causes of the Battle of Ṣiffīn

Imam ʿAlī's Firm Message to Muʿāwiyah

When the pillars of the Commander of the Faithful's divine, rightful government were consolidated through the dispatch of qualified governors and the removal of incompetent individuals, it was time for the Imam to root out the wicked tree in the land of Syria and rid the Islamic community of its evil. This decision was finalised when Jarīr, the governor of Hamadān, arrived in Kufa and, knowing about the Imam's intention, suggested to the Imam that he carry his message. Jarīr told the Imam, 'There is a lifelong friendship between Muʿāwiyah and me. I shall call on him to recognise your rightful rule. Then he will remain as your governor in Syria as long as he is obedient to God.'

Imam ʿAlī remained silent concerning his last condition and said nothing, because he knew that Jarīr was not qualified to undertake this task. Mālik al-Ashtar opposed the idea of Jarīr representing the Imam and accused him of colluding with Muʿāwiyah. However, contrary to his view, the Imam chose Jarīr for this purpose,[1] and the subsequent events also proved the correctness of the Imam's action. When Jarīr was being dispatched to Syria, the Imam told him, 'You noticed that the Prophet's followers who are all characterised by faith and discernment are my companions...The Prophet described you as an upright man from Yemen. Go to Muʿāwiyah with my letter. If he submits to what Muslims have unanimously decided, so much the better; otherwise, let him know that the peace and quiet that has so far existed will no longer exist,[1] and tell him that I have never approved of his governorship, and that people would not approve of his holding this position either.[2]

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 235; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Beirut edition), vol. 2, p. 184; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 141; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 74.

Jarīr, carrying the Imam's letter, left for Syria. When he met Mu'āwiyah, he said,

> The people of Mecca and Medina, Kufa and Basra, Hejaz and Yemen, Egypt and Oman, and Bahrain and Yamāmah have all pledged allegiance to your cousin, 'Alī, and there is nobody on your side except those who are in these few castles that are around you; and if a flood flows down from their deserts, it will drown you all. I have come here in order to invite you to take the path to salvation and pledge allegiance to this man.[3]

Then, he handed the Imam's letter to Mu'āwiyah. The letter read as follows:

> The pledge of allegiance to me [on the part of the Migrants and the Helpers] in Medina gave you an ultimatum in Syria and bound you to obedience. Those who had sworn allegiance to Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān pledged allegiance to me in the same manner. Following this oath of allegiance, those who were present have no right to oppose it, and those who were absent like you are not allowed to reject it either.
>
> The *shūrā* [according to your view] is one of the rights of the Migrants and the Helpers. That is, if they reach a consensus on the imamate of someone and call him their imam, God will be satisfied with that; and if someone disobeys them in protest or with the intention of causing a schism, they will subdue him. If he rises in revolt, they will fight against him because of his following a path other than that of the faithful; and God will leave him in aberration and make him go into hell on the Day

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[1] The Islamic ruler, before declaring war, should warn that the safety that has so far existed will no longer exist. The Holy Qur'an emphasises this point in the following verse: '*And if you fear treachery from a people, break off* [*the treaty*] *with them in a like manner*' (8:58).

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 27–28; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 5, p. 235.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 847; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 75; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 28.

of Judgement, and what a bad fate it is.[1]

Ṭalḥah and Zubayr swore allegiance to me and then broke their pledge of allegiance; breaking the pledge of allegiance is like rejecting it [i.e. like what you, O Muʿāwiyah, have done]. And then the truth came and the divine command prevailed. The best thing which I can wish you is good health and good fortune, but if you expose yourself to misfortune, I shall fight against you and seek assistance from God in doing so. You have spoken too much about the assassins of ʿUthmān. You also do what other Muslims have done, and then raise this issue before me. I shall make everybody act in conformity with the divine book. [As regards your request that I turn in the assassins of ʿUthmān to you before you pledge allegiance to me] [T]his request is like deceiving an infant into forgoing his mother's breast. I swear to my soul that if you refer to your wisdom, not your desires, you will find me to be the most upright person with regard to ʿUthmān's blood. Bear in mind that you are one of the *ṭulaqā* (the freed ones who had undergone captivity under Islam), who are not entitled to the caliphate, and who have no right to be on a council. I am dispatching Jarīr ibn ʿAbd Allāh, who is one of the Migrants and believers, to you and other individuals whom you have assigned as aides so that you will pledge allegiance and express your loyalty.[2]

The Imam's Representative in Syria

The emissary or representative of a person reflects that person's character, and good choice and appropriate selection indicates the maturity and perfection of his wisdom. For this reason, since ancient times, thinkers have said, 'Good choice is a sign of a man's wisdom and a measure of his mental maturity.'

In order to notify the order on the dismissal of Muʿāwiyah, Imam ʿAlī chose a person who had long handled political and governmental affairs, and who knew Mu'āwiyah well and was himself an eloquent orator and a fluent speaker. This person was Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bijillī.[1] He handed the Imam's letter to Mu'āwiyah in an official meeting. When he finished reading the letter, Jarīr, as Imam 'Alī's official spokesman, stood up and delivered a very pleasant speech. In his speech, he first praised God and uttered salutations upon the Prophet and then said:

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[1] Allusion is made to the following verse of the Holy Qur'an: '*But whoever defies the Messenger, after the guidance has become manifest to him, and follows a way other than that of the faithful, We shall abandon him to his devices and We shall make him enter hell, and it is an evil destination*' (4:115).

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 29–30; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1 pp. 84–85; *ʿIqd al-Farīd*, vol. 4, p. 322; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* (Leiden edition), vol. 3, part 5, p. 235. Ibn ʿAsākir in the biography of Muʿāwiyah in *the History of Syria* and Sayyid al-Raḍī in *Nahj al-Balāghah* have omitted part of the beginning of this letter (see *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 6).

> The incident related to 'Uthmān [i.e. his being killed at the hands of the Prophet's followers] has rendered helpless those who were present in Medina, let alone those who were absent from the scene of the incident. And people swore allegiance to 'Alī, and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr were also among those who did so, but they later broke their pledge of allegiance with no good reason. The religion of Islam would not tolerate sedition and rebellion, and the Arab people would not tolerate the sword either. Yesterday, a tragic incident occurred in Basra, and if it is repeated, nobody will remain alive. Keep in mind that the general public pledged allegiance to 'Alī, and if God had entrusted the task to us, we would not have chosen anyone except him. Whoever expresses opposition to the people's choice will be appeased (so that he will also recognise the leader chosen by people). O Mu'āwiyah! You also do what people have done and recognise 'Alī as ruler of Muslims. You may say that you have been assigned to this position by 'Uthmān, and that he has not discharged you yet; but if this remark is accepted, no religion will remain for God, and everybody will hold tightly what he has in his hand.[2]

When the Imam's representative brought his speech to an end, Mu'āwiyah told him, 'Wait until I inquire of the views of the people of Syria, and then I shall inform you about the result.'[3]

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[1] Although he was later charged with neglecting his duty, this charge is not proved, and more will be said in this regard.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 85; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 30–31; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 76–77.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 77.

The Imam's Intention behind Obtaining the Pledge of Allegiance was to Dismiss Muʿāwiyah

Imam ʿAlī had never insisted on obtaining the pledge of allegiance from anybody since the very beginning of his rule; so why was he insisting on gaining the pledge of allegiance from Muʿāwiyah? The reason was that the Imam intended to dismiss him through obtaining the pledge of allegiance and divest him of his power over the possessions and rights of Muslims. As a matter of fact, those who had shaken hands with the Imam as the ruler of Muslims had appealed to him to change the conditions of Muslims to those that existed at the time of the Prophet and not fail to protect their interests and promote the Islamic objectives. The existence of individuals like Muʿāwiyah posed a major obstacle in this regard. Basically, the revolution against ʿUthmān was formed for the purpose of removing all the former governors and office holders from their positions and divesting the worldly individuals of their power over the rights of the needy.

Muʿāwiyah Raises the Issue with the People of Syria

One day the proclaimer of Muʿāwiyah's court invited a group of the Syrian people to assemble in the mosque. Muʿāwiyah mounted the pulpit and praised God and described Syria as the land that had been assigned by God to His prophets and pious servants, and as the land of the people who had always obeyed and assisted God and the upholders of His command and the defenders of His law and religion. Then, he told the people:

> You know that I am the representative of the commanders of the faithful, ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb and ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān. I have done nothing against anyone, and thus I do not feel ashamed. I am the protector of ʿUthmān's blood (*walī al-damm*)[1], who was unfairly killed, and God says: *'Do not kill a soul* [*whose life*] *God has made inviolable, except with due cause, and whoever is killed wrongfully, We have certainly given his heir an authority. But let him not commit any excess in killing, for he enjoys the support* [*of*

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[1] *Walī al-damm* is the closest male relative, of the same father, to the deceased and entitled to waive on his own behalf, and that of other interested parties and heirs, the right to demand retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*) in kind for a murder or the right to financial compensation (*dīyah*). [Translator]

the law]' (17:33). Now I would like to know your views about the murder of 'Uthmān.

At this moment, those present in the mosque stood up and said, 'We are desirous of avenging 'Uthmān's murder.' Then, they vowed to assist him in doing so and pledged that they would sacrifice their lives and possessions for this purpose.[1]

The Analysis of Mu'āwiyah's Remarks

1. Mu'āwiyah referred to Syria as the land of prophets and described the people of Syria as the companions of the prophets' representatives and defenders of the divine religion and law in order to both portray himself as the defender of the divine religion and excite the people's emotions in his own favour and steer everybody towards a devastating war.
2. He portrayed the slain caliph as a person who had been unfairly killed at the hands of a group of wrongdoers, whereas his blood had been spilled by the Prophet's companions and the *tābi'ūn*, and according to their logic the companions and the *tābi'ūn* were followers of the right path and fair and just individuals.
3. Supposing that 'Uthmān had been unjustly killed, and that his *walī al-damm* was to make a decision with respect to the killers, what is meant by *walī al-damm* (the avenger of blood) is the one who inherits the slain person's property. Was Mu'āwiyah the heir to 'Uthmān's property, or in view of 'Uthmān's near of kin, was Mu'āwiyah not in a position to inherit his property? It is true that 'Uthmān was the son of 'Affān, who was the son of Abī 'Āṣ ibn Umayyah, and that Mu'āwiyah was the son of Abū Sufyān, who was the son of Ḥarb ibn Umayyah, and that they were all descended from Umayyah, but considering that Mu'āwiyah was a distant relative of 'Uthmān, and that there were persons more closely related to 'Uthmān, was Mu'āwiyah entitled to call himself the avenger of 'Uthmān's blood?

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 77–78; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 31–32.

The Commander of the Faithful, in a letter to Mu'āwiyah, states, 'You are one of the descendants of Umayyah, and the children of 'Uthmān are more eligible than you to avenge their father's blood.'[1]

These are some questions, the answers to which reveal what the son of Abū Sufyān had in his mind and make it clear that he did not really intend to avenge 'Uthmān's blood, but that his main intention was to take up the reins of government and depose an imam to whom the Migrants and the Helpers had unanimously pledged allegiance. More surprising was the way he sought the views of the Syrian people. While Mu'āwiyah was seeking the views of the people of Syria, he also expressed his firm intention to avenge 'Uthmān's blood and insisted on his intention. This kind of 'preparation' has been common since the distant past, and imposing one's aim and intention has wrongly been called seeking the views of others.

It is recorded in history that although Mu'āwiyah received a positive response from his audience, he was heavy hearted and muttered a poem to himself, the last verse of which was as follows:

I am hoping for the best thing that a person could hope for

And I am not hopeless with regard to the land of Iraq.[2]

In order to achieve his goal, Mu'āwiyah invited his adherents to attend a meeting. At the meeting, 'Atabah ibn Abū Sufyān told him, 'You had better bring up the issue of fighting against 'Alī with 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and try to buy his religion, since he is the one who remained aloof from 'Uthmān when he was the caliph, and naturally he will seclude himself more under your rule, unless you win his support through dirhams and dinārs.'[3]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 58; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 91–92.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 78.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 33; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 79.

13

Muʿāwiyah's Actions to Confront Imam ʿAlī

Muʿāwiyah's Letter to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ

In order to acquire the cooperation of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, the old soldier of the political arena, Muʿāwiyah wrote a letter to him. ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ was then living in Palestine as an undesirable and outcast element. Muʿāwiyah's letter reads as follows:

> You have been told about the incident related to ʿAlī and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. Marwān ibn Ḥakam and a group of people from Basra have come to Syria, and Jarīr ibn ʿAbd Allāh, as ʿAlī's representative, has arrived in Syria in order to obtain the pledge of allegiance. I have not made any decisions yet because I want to know your opinion. Come here as soon as possible so that we can exchange views on this issue.[1]

When ʿAmr received the letter, he spoke to his sons, ʿAbd Allāh and Muḥammad, about its contents and inquired as to their views. His first son, who is known in history for his somewhat noble disposition (God knows best!), told him, 'The day when the Prophet and the two caliphs who succeeded him passed away they were all pleased with you, and the day when ʿUthmān was slain you were not in Medina. Now you had better remain in your house and refrain from colluding with Muʿāwiyah for some meagre profit, since you will never attain the caliphate, and the sun of your life will soon set, and you will suffer misfortune at the end of your life.' However, contrary to his first son's opinion, his second son encouraged him to cooperate with Muʿāwiyah and told him, 'You are one of the elders of the Quraysh, and if you remain silent with respect to issues of this kind, you will lose your dignity in the eyes of the public. The people of Syria are in the right. Help them and seek revenge for the murder of 'Uthmān, and if you do so, the Umayyads will also rise up for this purpose.'

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 84; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 34.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, who was a clever person, addressed 'Abd Allāh and said, 'Your opinion will benefit my religion, whereas Muḥammad's view will be of benefit to my worldly concerns. I think I should ponder over this issue.' Then, he composed a poem which reflected the views of his two sons. Afterwards, he inquired as to the opinion of his youngest son, Wardān. He told his father, 'Shall I tell you about what you have in your mind?'

'Amr said, 'Tell me whatever you know.'

He said, 'The world and the hereafter are preoccupying you. Following 'Alī will lead to your felicity in the hereafter, and although in following him no worldly desires will be fulfilled, your life in the hereafter will compensate for this lack of fulfilment. However, cooperating with Mu'āwiyah will benefit your life in this world, but not your life in the hereafter, and your worldly life will not compensate for your otherworldly felicity. You are now facing these two options and are wondering which one to choose.'

When 'Amr heard his son's remarks, he said, 'What you told me was right. Now what is your opinion about this?'

Wardān replied, 'Remain in your house. If religion triumphs, you will live under its auspices, and if worldly people achieve victory, they will need you anyway.'

At this moment, 'Amr told his son, 'Are you suggesting that I stay in my house now despite the fact that every Arab has heard I am going to join Mu'āwiyah?'[1]

'Amr was a worldly person by nature and thus sided with Mu'āwiyah, but he referred to his youngest son's remarks in a pithy poem:

Following 'Alī is compatible with religion, but it serves no worldly concerns,
Whereas following Mu'āwiyah makes one enjoy worldly pleasures and power.
I opted for the world with discernment because of my craving for power,

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 87.

> But I have no justification or excuse for this choice.[1]

Then, he left for Syria and exchanged views with his old friend and put forward some plans to overthrow Imam ʿAlī which will later be explained.

Cooperation between two Veteran Politicians

Finally, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, the veteran politician of the clan of the Banū Sahm and the notorious Machiavellian of his time, preferred the world to the hereafter and left Palestine for Syria so as to be once again appointed as governor of Egypt in his old age and decrepitude. He knew quite well that Muʿāwiyah needed his counsel and advice and thus tried to entice him to pay a high price for his promise to cooperate with Muʿāwiyah.[2] He did not take a clear stance on the issues in the course of their talks and procrastinated in order to make Muʿāwiyah further interested in his advice.

During the first round of their talks, Muʿāwiyah referred to three problems and made it clear that the problem that had disturbed him most was ʿAlī's readiness to attack the land of Syria. The full text of their conversation, quoted from *The History of Ṣiffīn* by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim, is as follows.

> Muʿāwiyah: 'I have been preoccupied by three problems for the past few days, and I want you to find a solution to them.'
>
> ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ: 'What are those three problems?'
>
> Muʿāwiyah: 'Muḥammad ibn Abū Ḥudhayfah has broken out of Egypt's prison, and he is one of the maladies afflicting the religion [or, rather, Muʿāwiyah's rule!].'

It should be explained here that handling the affairs of the province of Egypt had been entrusted to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saʿd ibn Abī Sarḥ under ʿUthmān, and Muḥammad ibn Abū Ḥudhayfah was one of those who incited the public to rise up against the incumbent governor. After the murder of ʿUthmān, the governor left the land of Egypt in fear of his life and appointed a representative to perform his duties. However, the son of Abū Ḥudhayfah incited the public to rebel against the governor's representative too and finally expelled him from Egypt and took up the reins of government himself. At the beginning of Imam 'Alī's caliphate, Qays ibn Sa'd was appointed governor of Egypt and Muḥammad was dismissed. When Mu'āwiyah conquered Egypt, he imprisoned Muḥammad, but he and his associates somehow escaped from prison.[1] In short, Muḥammad was a dynamic and adventurous personality, and he was also Mu'āwiyah's cousin.

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 36.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 87; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 186.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'This incident does not carry so much significance. You can dispatch a number of people to kill or capture him and turn him over to you. Even if you do not capture him, he is not so dangerous as to be able to take your rule away from you.'

Mu'āwiyah: 'The Roman emperor, accompanied by a group of Romans, is ready to embark on an expedition to Syria in order to take this rule away from us.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'You should try to solve the problem of the Roman emperor through the offering of gifts such as male and female Roman slaves and gold and silver utensils and urge upon him peaceful coexistence, which he will soon opt for.'

Mu'āwiyah: ''Alī has dismounted in Kufa and is ready to mobilise his army for a confrontation with us. What do you think about this problem?'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'The Arabs would never consider you to be on a par with 'Alī. He is familiar with the secrets of warfare, and there is no match for him in the Quraysh. He is rightfully holding the reins of government, but you might treat him unjustly and divest him of his right.'

Mu'āwiyah: 'I would like you to fight against this man, who has disobeyed God and slain the caliph and caused a tribulation and given rise to a division in the community and severed the ties of kinship.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'I swear to God that you and 'Alī would never be equal with respect to moral distinction and virtues. You would never have the merit of his migration or the record of his other achievements or his association with the Prophet or his jihad against the idolaters or his insight and knowledge. I swear to God that 'Alī has a sharp mind and a clear memory and is a man of perseverance. He is a virtuous and felicitous person and is tried and trusted by God. What price are you going to pay for fighting against this virtuous man so that I shall cooperate with you? You know what dangers this cooperation entails.'

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[1] *Usd al-Ghābah*, vol. 4, pp. 315–316.

Mu'āwiyah: 'You choose. What do you want?'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'Ruling over Egypt.'

Mu'āwiyah, who was taken aback, cunningly referred to the inferiority of the world to the hereafter: 'I would not like the Arabs to think that you have been prompted by worldly motives to join our camp. It would be better if they thought that you have assisted us in order to acquire divine pleasure and otherworldly reward, and the paltry and trifling worldly wealth would never be equal to otherworldly rewards.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'Stop making these [unfounded] remarks.'[1]

Mu'āwiyah: 'I can deceive you if I want to.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ: 'The likes of me will not be deceived, and I am cleverer than you think.'

Mu'āwiyah: 'Come closer. I want to tell you a secret.'

'Amr went closer and held his ear in front of Mu'āwiyah's mouth in order to hear his secret, but suddenly Mu'āwiyah bit his ear.

Mu'āwiyah: 'Now you saw that I can deceive you too.' He then added: 'You know that Egypt is like Iraq, and both are considered as large provinces.'

'Amr: 'Yes I know, but Iraq will belong to you only when Egypt belongs to me. Still, the fact remains that the people of Iraq have expressed their obedience to 'Alī and are prepared to fight in his company.'

While the two brokers were busy arguing, Mu'āwiyah's brother, 'Atabah ibn Abū Sufyān, arrived and told his brother, 'Why do you not buy 'Amr for the price of ceding the land of Egypt to him? Let's hope that this very rule of Syria will remain yours, and that it will not be challenged.' Then he composed a poem which revealed the nature of the cooperation between 'Amr and Mu'āwiyah. One of the verses of the poem is as follows:

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd in *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah* (Egypt edition, vol. 2, p. 65) writes: 'I told my teacher Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī, "Does this remark by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ not indicate his irreligiousness and his lack of belief in the hereafter?" He told me, "'Amr had never embraced Islam and had remained an infidel as he was at the time of pre-Islamic ignorance."'

Give 'Amr what he wants,
For today he has forsaken his religion for the sake of the world.[1]

Finally, Mu'āwiyah decided to win 'Amr's cooperation by any means possible and submit to his request. However, 'Amr was not reassured about his deceit and trickery and deemed it likely that Mu'āwiyah might use him as the gate to victory and then cast him aside in the end. Thus, he addressed Mu'āwiyah and said, 'Our agreement should be put on paper, and a contract should be drawn up in this regard and signed by both sides.' The agreement was written down and made ready for signature, but each of the signatories wrote a sentence next to his seal and signature, revealing his deceit and hypocrisy. Mu'āwiyah wrote next to his name: 'This agreement will be valid as long as no condition contravenes any obedience.' And 'Amr also wrote next to his name and seal: 'This agreement will be valid provided that no obedience contravenes any condition.'[2]

By adding these stipulations, the two cheated each other and opened the way for their violations of the agreement. In fact, by the above stipulation, Mu'āwiyah meant that 'Amr had pledged allegiance to him unconditionally, and that he had no right to break his oath of allegiance even if one day Mu'āwiyah refused to fulfil his promise to cede Egypt to him. But when Mu'āwiyah's veteran partner became aware of his trick, he thwarted Mu'āwiyah by writing down that his pledge of allegiance would be valid as long as his obedience to Mu'āwiyah did not contravene the condition of the contract (i.e. the rule of Egypt), meaning that Mu'āwiyah had to cede Egypt to him. Indeed, both were sly politicians who lacked not only religious piety but political piety too.

'Amr, who was overjoyed, left Mu'āwiyah's house and met those who were waiting for him outside the house, and the following conversation took place between them.

'Amr's sons: 'O father! What finally happened?'

'Amr: 'The rule of Egypt was given to me.'

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[1] The Prophet, in one of his statements, referred to a religious precept, 'Do not sell what you do not own.' Now it should be seen what 'Amr had sold and renounced in return for the rule of Egypt. 'Amr, who according to Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd lacked faith and religious belief up to the moment of making the deal with Mu'āwiyah, evidently acted deceitfully in this deal too and obtained the rule of Egypt free of cost.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 40.

> 'Amr's sons: 'The land of Egypt is nothing compared with the dominion of the Arab power.'
>
> 'Amr: 'If the land of Egypt does not satisfy you, God will never satisfy you.'[1]
>
> 'Amr's nephew: 'What is your excuse for living among the Quraysh? You gave up your religion and were deceived by the worldly possessions of another person. Will the people of Egypt, who are the killers of 'Uthmān, turn over that province to Mu'āwiyah so long as 'Alī is present? And supposing Mu'āwiyah takes control of Egypt, will he not use the sentence he has written next to his signature as an excuse for doing away with your power over the land of Egypt?'

'Amr thought for a moment and then, driven by the habit of the Arab people and not by any belief in his words, said, 'I am counting on God, not on 'Alī or Mu'āwiyah. If I were siding with 'Alī, my house would be enough for me, but now I am siding with Mu'āwiyah!'

> 'Amr's nephew: 'If you had not sided with Mu'āwiyah, he would not have chosen you either. You are covetous of his worldly possessions, and he is desirous of your religion.'

Mu'āwiyah was informed about the conversation between 'Amr's nephew and his uncle outside his court and decided to arrest him, but he fled to Iraq and joined Imam 'Alī's army and informed him about the negotiation and deal between the two veteran politicians. He finally attained a special position with the Imam.[2]

Also, when Marwān ibn Ḥakam learned of the political deal between Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr, he protested and said, 'Why do they not buy us like 'Amr (and cede part of the Islamic territories to us in return for our Umayyad religion)?' When Mu'āwiyah was told about his remark, he comforted Marwān and said, 'The people like 'Amr are bought for the likes of you so that they will strengthen the Umayyad rule, of which you are a part.'[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 37–40; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 87–88 (differing slightly).

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 41. Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim in *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (p. 88) refers to this young person as 'Amr's cousin.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 88.

The Evil Schemes of 'Amr are Carried Out

The deal between the two cunning politicians had been concluded, and now it was time for Mu'āwiyah to carry out 'Amr's plots. What 'Amr had suggested with respect to dealing with Muḥammad ibn Abū Ḥudhayfah and the Roman emperor's plan to attack Syria was carefully implemented, and success was achieved in both cases. However, the big problem of confronting Imam 'Alī, who was getting ready to set off for Syria, still remained. In order to confront the Imam, 'Amr thought up a plan that caused the majority of the Syrian people to rally most willingly behind Mu'āwiyah and prepare to fight against Imam 'Alī. It should be examined how this plan caused the well-off and pleasure-seeking people of Syria to leave home and prefer death to comfortable life.

It is narrated that one of the aged companions of the Prophet went to Mu'āwiyah, who extended a very warm welcome to him. He sat between Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and asked, 'Do you know why I sat between you?' They answered in the negative. He said, 'One day you two were whispering to each other in the presence of the Prophet. The Prophet prayed that God may have mercy upon the person who separates you from each other, since your assembly serves no good purpose.'[1]

No factor like religious belief is motivational and impelling. Nevertheless, religious feelings are like a double-edged sword which, if used by opportunistic rulers, can wreak havoc and cause unimaginable harm.

'Amr's plan for confronting Imam 'Alī was to stir up the religious feelings of the Syrian people against the Imam by accusing him of killing the former caliph and by disseminating this accusation through the agency of ascetic and austere individuals who were respected by the general public. Besides, he addressed Mu'āwiyah and said, 'Shuraḥbīl Kindī[2] is respected by the Syrian people, and he is hostile to his fellow countryman, Jarīr, 'Alī's representative. You should inform him about the incident in such a manner that he will believe that 'Alī is the killer of 'Uthmān, and you should assign those who are trusted by you and him to disseminate this accusation throughout Syria, and if he comes to believe something, he will not give up his belief so easily.'[1]

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[1] Hindūshāh Nakhjawānī, *Tajārub al-Salaf*, ed. 'Abbās Iqbāl, p. 46.

[2] Kindī (rhyming with *ghibṭī*) was the name of a Yemeni tribe that lived in the south of the Arabian peninsula, and then a large number of its members migrated to other places like Syria. Shuraḥbīl belonged to this tribe, and his ancestors had migrated from Yemen to Syria.

Mu'āwiyah's Letter to Shuraḥbīl

Mu'āwiyah wrote a letter to Shuraḥbīl informing him about Jarīr's arrival in Syria as 'Alī's representative. Shuraḥbīl, who lived then in the city of Ḥimṣ in Syria, had been invited by Mu'āwiyah to go to Damascus as soon as possible. Afterwards, Mu'āwiyah assigned the pensioners of his court, who were all from Yemen (Qaḥṭān) and who were on good terms with Shuraḥbīl, to go to Ḥimṣ and unanimously and in unison portray 'Alī as the killer of the third caliph. When Shuraḥbīl received Mu'āwiyah's letter, he summoned his associates and told them about Mu'āwiyah's invitation. A man by the name of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ghanam Azdī, who was the wisest person in Syria, stood up and warned Shuraḥbīl about the bad consequences of accepting Mu'āwiyah's invitation. He said, 'You have unceasingly enjoyed divine mercy ever since you moved from atheism to Islam, and God will not withhold His blessings as long as people express their gratefulness to Him, and God will never change the condition of a community unless they change their own condition. We are told that 'Uthmān has been killed by 'Alī. Even if he was indeed killed by 'Alī, the Migrants and the Helpers have pledged allegiance to 'Alī, and they are the rulers of the people. But in the event that he was not killed by 'Alī, why are you endorsing Mu'āwiyah? I urge you not to have yourself and your relatives caught in the trap of perdition. But if you are afraid that Jarīr may attain a certain position of authority, you can also go to 'Alī and swear allegiance to him along with your tribesmen and the people of Damascus.'

However, the goodwill of the man from Azd did not prove effective, and Shuraḥbīl accepted Mu'āwiyah's invitation and departed for Damascus.[2]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 44; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 71.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 44–45; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 71.

Mu'āwiyah Seeks Assistance from the Tribal Chiefs and Naïve Ascetics

In tribal communities the chief of the tribe has the power to make whatever decision he wishes, and his siding with one party to a dispute causes all members of the tribe, or at least a branch of the tribe, to do likewise. In fact, the single vote of the tribal chief replaces all votes and opinions, particularly when he enjoys a lofty status.

Mu'āwiyah needed to win the support of these individuals in order to be able to mobilise the native inhabitants of Damascus and the Yemenite immigrants who resided there, and his mentor 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ had also advised him to do so. As regards Shuraḥbīl,[1] who was from Yemen and who resided in the city of Ḥimṣ in Syria, he possessed both of the above characteristics, namely he both had a saintly appearance and was regarded as the chief of the Yemeni immigrants, and winning his support could lead to a change in public attitude towards the Imam.

Therefore, Mu'āwiyah wrote a letter to Shuraḥbīl and invited him to Damascus[2] and assigned a number of individuals who were trusted by Shuraḥbīl to constantly keep him company and portray 'Alī as the killer of 'Uthmān and try to brainwash him so that he would only think of the Imam as the killer of the former caliph.

Shuraḥbīl departed Ḥimṣ and was warmly welcomed by everyone when he arrived in Damascus. Mu'āwiyah held a meeting with him and told the ascetic of Syria, 'Jarīr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bijillī has come from Iraq and is inviting us to pledge allegiance to 'Alī, and 'Alī is the best of men except that he is the killer of 'Uthmān. I have refrained from making any decisions, since I am an individual from Syria and shall approve of what the Syrians opt for and disapprove of what they regard as undesirable.'

Shuraḥbīl refused to comment and told Mu'āwiyah that he had to investigate before he could express any views. Hence, he left the gathering and began an investigation.[3] Those individuals who had already been assigned by Mu'āwiyah to influence his attitude towards Imam 'Alī kept him company on various pretexts to affirm that the Imam was the killer of 'Uthmān, and thus they created doubts in his mind about the Imam's innocence.

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[1] Ibn Abū Ḥātim has mentioned him in the book *Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl* (vol. 4, p. 338), and Bukhārī has included his biography in his *Ta'rīkh* (vol. 2, p. 249).

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 44–45; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 71; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 143.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 44–45; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 71; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 143.

The poisonous and utterly false propaganda so deeply influenced this sombre but naïve individual that he became even more extreme in his attitude than Mu'āwiyah himself. Consequently, the next time that he met Mu'āwiyah, he said, 'The people have told me nothing except that 'Alī is the killer of 'Uthmān. For this reason, you are not allowed to pledge allegiance to him, and if you do so, we shall either kill you or expel you from Syria.'[1]

When Mu'āwiyah heard his remark, he realised that his hirelings had deceived this simple-minded ascetic very well. Thus, he told Shuraḥbīl, 'I am one of the inhabitants of Syria, and I shall never oppose you.'

Following his meeting with Mu'āwiyah, the ascetic of Syria went to see Ḥaṣīn ibn Numayr. He asked Ḥaṣīn to send for Jarīr, the Imam's representative, so that he could also discuss the matter with him.

Shuraḥbīl's Conversation with the Imam's Representative

After Jarīr and Ḥaṣīn called on Shuraḥbīl, the following conversation took place between Shuraḥbīl and the Imam's representative.

> Shuraḥbīl: 'You have come to us with an ambiguous report. It seems as if you intend to throw us into the lion's mouth and create disturbance in Iraq and Syria. You praise 'Alī, whereas he is the killer of 'Uthmān, and you will be held accountable before God on the Day of Judgement.'
>
> Jarīr: 'I never came to you with an ambiguous report. How can 'Alī's caliphate be ambiguous while the Migrants and the Helpers have sworn allegiance to him and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr have been killed for breaking their pledge of allegiance? You have thrown yourself into the lion's mouth, and I have never done so. If Iraq and Syria become united to uphold the truth, it will be better than when they are separated from each other because of a falsehood. As regards your claim that 'Alī is the killer of 'Uthmān, I swear to God that this claim is nothing but shooting the arrow of slander from a distant

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 47–48; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 73.

point. You have a liking for the world, and you harboured certain thoughts in the past at the time of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ.'[1]

The meeting came to an end, and Jarīr later sent a message in the form of an ode to Shuraḥbīl, his fellow Yemeni countryman living in Syria. The message read as follows:

O Shuraḥbīl, the son of Samiṭ!
Do not indulge in yearnings and desires
since there will never be a substitute for religion in this world.
And tell the son of Ḥarb that you are no longer respected
today and cannot achieve your goal,
And thus dash his hopes.[2]

When Shuraḥbīl received Jarīr's concise composition which conveyed an admonitory message, he was deeply impressed and was made to ponder. Then, he told himself, 'This statement is an admonition for me in the world and in the hereafter. I swear to God that I shall not rush into making a decision.'

When Mu'āwiyah learned about Jarīr's conversation with the influential ascetic of Syria and of Jarīr's message to Shuraḥbīl, he rebuked the Imam's representative. Then, in order to nullify Jarīr's words, he got a group of people to constantly keep in touch with Shuraḥbīl and try to make him believe that 'Uthmān had been killed at the hands of the Imam. He ordered the group to give false testimony and provide Shuraḥbīl with forged letters in order to achieve their goal.

The group of mercenaries finally managed to once again deceive the awakened ascetic, and Shuraḥbīl was misled by the hired witnesses and made a definite decision.[3]

When the chiefs of other Yemeni tribes learned about Shuraḥbīl's decision and his having been deceived, the only remedy they could think of was to ask his nephew to talk to him and enlighten him about the matter.

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[1] Jarīr's statement alludes to the following verse of the holy Qur'an: '*They shoot at the invisible from a far-off place!*' (34:53). *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 47–48.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 48–49; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 80–81.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 49; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 81.

His nephew was one of those few Syrians who had sworn allegiance to the Imam, and he was counted among the pious and the virtuous in Syria.

He composed an ode in which he revealed Mu'āwiyah's intrigues and stratagems and reminded Shuraḥbīl that those witnesses and letters were nothing but a setup, and that none of them was genuine.

When Shuraḥbīl was informed about the contents of his poem, he said, 'He is the messenger of Satan. I swear to God that I shall expel him from Syria unless I cannot get hold of him.'[1]

Mu'āwiyah was monitoring Shuraḥbīl's course of thinking through his agents, and when he found Shuraḥbīl to be adamant in his decision, he sent him a message that read as follows: 'May God reward you for your responding to the truth. You know that the pious men in society agree with you, but the awareness and agreement of this group is not enough to fight against 'Alī, and it is necessary to acquire the consent of the general public for the jihad against 'Alī. Therefore, you have no alternative but to travel to the different cities of Syria and declare that 'Uthmān has been killed by 'Alī, and that it is incumbent upon Muslims to take revenge on his killer.'

Shuraḥbīl began his journey to the different cities of Syria. First, he visited the region of Ḥimṣ and made a speech there. He said, 'O people! 'Uthmān has been killed by 'Alī, who has also killed a number of people who were angry with him. And, ultimately, 'Alī has taken control of all the Islamic territories except Syria. He is carrying his sword and stepping into whirlpools of death in order to reach you, and he will do so unless God decrees a new destiny. And nobody is stronger than Mu'āwiyah to confront him. Rise to your feet and get moving.'

The words of this deceived ascetic influenced the people of Ḥimṣ who had a special affection for him, and everybody made a positive response to his request, except the pious and devout men of Ḥimṣ who all reproached him. Then, Shuraḥbīl travelled to other cities of Syria and called on their inhabitants to take part in the 'jihad' against 'Alī, and he also received a positive response from them.

Shuraḥbīl returned to Damascus following his multi-legged journey and, elated at his own success, called on Mu'āwiyah. At the meeting, he vehemently repeated his previous remarks and told Mu'āwiyah, 'If you fight a jihad against 'Alī and the killers of 'Uthmān, we shall either take our revenge or sacrifice our lives for our purpose, and in this case you will remain in your position. Otherwise, we shall dismiss you from your position and bring somebody else to power so as to fight a jihad under his aegis and take our revenge on 'Alī for the murder of 'Uthmān or get killed.'[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 49–50.

Mu'āwiyah was overjoyed to hear the caustic and pungent remarks of this deceived ascetic.

Jarīr's Ultimatum

Jarīr was deeply distressed by this incident, which he had never expected to happen. He once again got in touch with his long-time friend and the ascetic of his tribe and warned him against the grave consequences of his decision. He told Shuraḥbīl, 'God has prevented the Islamic *ummah* from bloodshed and obviated schism, and the Islamic territories are about to attain peace and tranquillity. Be careful you do not commit sedition among the public. Restrain yourself from making public remarks lest the situation should deteriorate to such an extent that you will no longer be able to rectify it.'

Shuraḥbīl responded, 'No, I shall never conceal my opinion.' Then, he left Jarīr and addressed a public assembly. The people, considering his record of worship, backed up his position. Facing this situation, the Imam's representative was overwhelmed by despair and disappointment and did not know what to do.[2]

The Reasons for the Failure of the Imam's Representative in Syria

There is no doubt that Jarīr, the representative of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī, who had been dispatched to Syria in order to seek allegiance, failed in his mission. He not only did not succeed in his assignment but also informed the Imam of Mu'āwiyah's final decision when it was too late, namely when Mu'āwiyah had prepared the Syrian people for a military confrontation with the Imam. The reason for Jarīr's negligence was due to his being deceived by Mu'āwiyah's procrastination since his arrival in Syria. It was from his slyness that the deposed ruler of Syria had refused to give a definite answer. Slyness characterised the Umayyad clan and kept the Imam's representative in a state of uncertainty. Jarīr, hoping that he would be able to make Mu'āwiyah pledge allegiance to the Imam, had decided to stay longer in Syria and kept asking Mu'āwiyah to give a definite answer.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 82–83; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 50–52.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 84; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 52.

Expressing an explicit view during the first days was not advantageous to Mu'āwiyah. Undoubtedly, ever since the arrival of the Imam's representative, what Mu'āwiyah had in mind was opposition to, and insurrection and rebellion against, the central caliphate. But taking such a stand in those days would have caused the Imam's representative to return to Kufa and inform the Imam about Mu'āwiyah's opposition, and naturally the Imam would not have hesitated to suppress those opposed to the legitimate and rightful government and would have overpowered him with a large army and rooted out insurrection.

Anyhow, Mu'āwiyah kept the Imam's representative waiting in Syria on various pretexts until he gained 'Amr's cooperation in fighting against the central government, and then by dispatching propagandists to different parts of Syria, he drew a very ugly picture of 'Alī in the minds of the inhabitants of those regions and used their attachment to the caliphate and the Prophet's succession to promote his own interests. Besides this, he won the approval of Shuraḥbīl, the well-known ascetic of Syria who had a strong influence on the general public, for opposing the Imam, and this deceived ascetic was so determined to confront the Imam that even if Mu'āwiyah changed his mind, he would have mobilised the simple-minded people of Syria against the Imam.

Mu'āwiyah succeeded in achieving his diabolic goals only because Jarīr, the Imam's representative, having been misled by Mu'āwiyah's pretensions, failed to perform the task that had had been entrusted to him and caused the Imam to delay his decision to eradicate insurgency. Jarīr returned to the Imam only when Mu'āwiyah had mobilised a significant portion of the population in the Islamic territories against the Imam and when they were harbouring thoughts of revenge on the killers of 'Uthmān, assuming that they had been headed by the Imam.

Mu'āwiyah's Last Scheme

The last card that Mu'āwiyah decided to play was to ascertain, at the last moment, whether Imam 'Alī was really determined to remove him from his position. Thus, he went to the house of Jarīr, the Imam's representative, and told him, 'I have a new idea. I would like to suggest that you write to your friend and ask him to entrust me with the rule of Syria and also give me the tribute of Egypt and not oblige me to pledge allegiance to anyone at the time of his death. If he does so, I shall submit to him and recognise his rule in writing.'[1]

The Imam's representative replied to him, 'You write your letter, and I shall verify it.' Finally, both letters were written and carried to Kufa by a single courier.

The text of Mu'āwiyah's letter caused a controversy among the Arab tribes, and a number of Mu'āwiyah's like-minded friends such as Walīd ibn 'Utbah reproached him for writing such a letter. Walīd sent a poem to Mu'āwiyah, the first verse of which read as follows:

> You have asked 'Alī for something which you will never get,
> and even if you get it, it will not remain in your hands longer than a few nights.[2]

The son of 'Uqbah stated a truth in the first half of the above verse, since Imam 'Alī would never have come to terms with, or become reconciled with, those departing from the right path. However, the second half of the verse is quite wrong because if the Imam had compromised owing to certain interests – although this was impossible – he would never have violated the settlement. The Imam displayed his commitment and adherence to agreement quite clearly with respect to the issue of the *ḥakamayn* (the two arbiters).

Mu'āwiyah knew the Imam better than Walīd and was aware that he would be the winner in both cases, that is to say, if the Imam entrusted him with the rule of Syria, he would enjoy a permanent and unchallenged rule, but if the Imam did not do so, he would become more determined to spill the blood of the steadfast peoples of Hejaz and Iraq. Besides, procrastinating and keeping the Imam's representative waiting in Syria was itself to Mu'āwiyah's advantage, since he could increase his combat capabilities and make the people of Syria better prepared for their fighting against the Imam.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 52; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 84.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 52; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 84.

The Imam's Reply to his Representative

> ...Mu'āwiyah's intention is to avoid committing himself to a pledge of allegiance to me so that he will choose whatever he desires, and he wants to keep you waiting in order that he will try out the people of Syria for fighting. During those first days when I was in Medina, Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah suggested that I reinstate Mu'āwiyah in his position, but I did not accept. God forbid that I seek assistance from irregular individuals. If he swears allegiance, so much the better; otherwise, return to me.[1]

In this letter, Imam 'Alī referred to one of the goals pursued by Mu'āwiyah, that is to say, he made it clear that Mu'āwiyah had resorted to the policy of 'procrastination' by making the above suggestion and that he intended to increase his combat capabilities in the period between writing his letter and receiving the reply and to encounter the Imam with more power if the Imam's reply was negative (Mu'āwiyah actually expected the Imam's reply to be negative).

Jarīr is Accused of Colluding with Mu'āwiyah

Jarīr's long stay in the land of Syria caused the people of Iraq to accuse him of colluding with the enemy. When Imam 'Alī heard the people's remarks, he made the following statement with regard to Jarīr, 'I shall again write a letter and put an end to his stay in Syria. If he continues to stay in Syria, it will become clear that he has either been deceived or disregarded my command and turned against me.' Consequently, the Imam wrote a letter to Jarīr that read as follows:

> When you receive my letter, make Mu'āwiyah express a definite view and let him choose between war (which causes the fighters to abandon their homes) and humble submission. If he opts for war, declare any protection for him or any pact with him null and void, and if he capitulates, gain the pledge of allegiance from him.[2]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 52; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 84.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 8; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 55 (with some difference in the text of the letter).

When Jarīr received the Imam's letter, he read it to Muʿāwiyah and told him, 'A man's heart contracts because of sins and expands because of repentance, and I view your heart as contracted. You are situated between truth and falsehood, and you are looking at something that is in the hands of someone else.' Muʿāwiyah told him, 'I shall express my definite view at our next meeting.' He expressed his view when the people of Syria had pledged allegiance to him, and when he had tried them out. It was then that he dismissed the Imam's representative so that he would join the Imam and wrote a letter to the Imam recorded by a number of historians as follows:

> If the Migrants and the Helpers had sworn allegiance to you with you being clear of 'Uthmān's blood, then your caliphate would have been like that of the three former caliphs. But you incited the Migrants to spill 'Uthmān's blood and prevented the Helpers from protecting him. As a result, the ignorant obeyed you and the weak became strong. The people of Syria have decided to fight against you until you deliver the killers of 'Uthmān to them. If you do so, the issue of caliphate will be raised at the council of Muslims. I swear by my soul that the relation between you and me is not like the relation between you and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, since those two had pledged allegiance to you but I have not done so. Likewise, the people of Syria are not like the people of Basra, since the people of Basra had sworn allegiance to you and committed themselves to your obedience, while the people of Syria have not accepted your caliphate and not committed themselves to your obedience. Nevertheless, I shall never negate your achievements in Islam and your affinity with the Prophet and your station among the Quraysh.[1]

This letter, which had been written with the ink of untruth, was among the Machiavellian stratagems of Muʿāwiyah, who would not refrain from levelling all kinds of accusations against his rival in order to further his goals. However, the Imam's letters contained the realities, as he merely stated the facts in order to uphold the truth. In a letter addressed to Muʿāwiyah, Imam ʿAlī replied to his accusations as follows:

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 91; Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 184; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 88.

> I received the letter of a man who has neither any common sense to guide him nor a leader to show him the right path. Whims and desires have allured him, and he has succumbed to those temptations and given way to them. You thought that what I did with regard to ʿUthmān has entitled you not to pledge allegiance to me. I swear to my soul that I was one of the Migrants and entered wherever they entered, and God will never assemble them in aberration and will not veil their eyes. As regards the murder of ʿUthmān, I neither issued any orders – so I am not guilty of issuing a wrong order – nor killed him – so I am not liable to blood-vengeance. As to your remark that the people of Syria are today the rulers of the people of Hejaz, show me a person from among the people of Syria whose membership in the council will be accepted and whose succession to the Prophet will befit him. If you hold this opinion, the Migrants and the Helpers will prove you wrong.
>
> Regarding your remark that I should turn over ʿUthmān's killers to you, this is a very improper remark. What is the relationship between you and ʿUthmān? You are a man belonging to the Umayyads, and the sons of ʿUthmān are more eligible than you for this task. If you think that you are stronger and more powerful in avenging their father's blood, enter the realm of obedience to us and then lodge a complaint against his killers. I shall make everybody tread the right path. But your judgement about Syria and Basra and me and Ṭalḥah and Zubayr is unfounded and the case is the same with regard to all, since it was a general pledging of allegiance and cannot be reconsidered and has no option of cancellation. However, as regards your insistence on accusing me concerning the murder of ʿUthmān, you never made this accusation in good faith and you had received no reports to this effect. You recognised my virtues and affinity with the Prophet and my dignity among the Quraysh; I swear by my soul that you would have denied them too if you had been able to do so.[1]

Then, the Imam ordered Najāshī, the spokesman of his government, to reply to Muʿāwiyah's letter with an epic composition, and ordered that both be sent to Muʿāwiyah.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 91–92; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 89; Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 224; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 57–58. Reference is also made to the contents of this letter in letters 6 and 7 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

The Imam's Representative Returns from Syria

There is no doubt about the eloquence, astuteness, patience, and forbearance of Jarīr, the Imam's representative, the qualities that are the basic characteristics of any political representative and diplomat. There is also no doubt that he made every effort to meet the Imam's demand without any bloodshed and make Muʿāwiyah obey the central government. However, he made one mistake, that is to say he was deceived by the procrastination of the two Umayyad veteran politicians, which gave Muʿāwiyah an opportunity to sound out the Syrian people and make them ready for war against the Imam. Muʿāwiyah expressed his final view when he had obtained the pledge of allegiance from the people of Syria to avenge ʿUthmān's blood.

Owing to Jarīr's mistake, Imam ʿAlī, who had arrived in Kufa on the first day of the month of Rajab 36 / 24 December 656, waited for Jarīr for a few months in order to learn about Muʿāwiyah's final view. Consequently, Muʿāwiyah managed to heavily arm the Syrians during this time and prepare everybody for the war against the Imam, and there was no longer any chance of attacking the enemy unawares.

There is by no means any conclusive proof of Jarīr's betrayal, but definitely his fault, or shortcoming, influenced the course of Islamic history, and the continuation of the sinister life of the Qāsiṭīn was owed to some extent to the mistake committed by the Imam's emissary.

Still, it is worthy of mention that Imam ʿAlī, during his stay in Kufa, performed several tasks and dismissed a number of governors and rulers and appointed pious and dedicated individuals, and the Imam's stay in Kufa during this time should not be attributed to Jarīr's delay, especially considering the fact that Imam ʿAlī summoned Jarīr, who was the governor of Hamadān, to Kufa and entrusted him with that momentous assignment after the Imam had stayed in Kufa for a while.

One of the problems that Imam ʿAlī faced in the meantime was that valorous individuals and youngsters who were ready to fight the enemy called on him, asking him to move his forces to the Syrian borders. But because the Imam intended to avoid bloodshed and settle the issue without any military confrontation, he did not approve of their request and told them:

> Issuing the order to mobilise, while my representative Jarīr is in Syria, will close the doors of peace to the Syrian people, and if they have any good intention, it will be destroyed. I have written a letter to Jarīr, instructing him to limit his stay there. If he postpones his return, it means that he has either been deceived or has opposed his Imam. I prefer to defer a decision in this regard for a while, but this will not prevent people from getting prepared gradually so that when it is time to move, there will be no delay.[1]

Jarīr's Reprimand before the Imam

After so much delay, Jarīr returned to the Imam in despair. Mālik al-Ashtar took him to task before the Imam, and harsh words were exchanged between them, some of which are as follows:

> Mālik: 'O Imam! If you had sent me in place of him, I would have carried out the assignment in an appropriate manner. This man closed all the doors of hope to us. The Umayyads bought his religion in the past by appointing him as governor of Hamadān. He does not deserve to walk on the earth. Now that he has returned from Syria, he is trying to make us afraid of their power. If the Imam allows me, I shall incarcerate him and his like-minded associates so that the matter will become clear and the oppressors will be annihilated.'
>
> Jarīr: 'I wish you had gone in my place, and in that case you would not have returned, for 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ or Dhī al-Kalā' and Ḥawshab Dhī Ẓulaym would have killed you because they count you among the killers of 'Uthmān.'
>
> Mālik: 'If I had gone, I would have been able to reply to them. I would have invited Mu'āwiyah to a certain course and I would not have given him a chance to think.'
>
> Jarīr: 'Now you can still go.'
>
> Mālik: 'Now that the die is cast and Mu'āwiyah is at an advantage?!'[2]

There is no doubt that Mālik's reasoning was strong, and that Jarīr had no proper response to his rational criticism. What was expected of such a defeated diplomat was to acknowledge his fault or shortcoming and ask for forgiveness. But he resisted Mālik's criticism and gradually distanced himself from the Imam and took refuge in the land of Qirqīsīyā (Circesium),[1] which lay on the bank of the Euphrates.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 42.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 60; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 114–115.

Considering that Jarīr had not committed any wrongdoing until then, his fault would have been forgivable. However, what he did afterwards was contrary to ethical principles, for secluding himself from the Imam and living in a remote point was in practice objecting to the Imam's rule. Besides, because of Jarīr's seclusion, tribal sentiments were aroused and very few people, namely only nineteen people, from Jarīr's tribe (which was one of the branches of the Bajīlah called Qasr) accompanied the Imam to Ṣiffīn. Nevertheless, from another branch of the Bajīlah (called Akhmas) 700 people joined the Imam.

Jarīr's action was a sort of protest and rebellion against the rightful government. Thus, in order to put an end to such actions, the Imam demolished the house of Jarīr and his like-minded friend Thawīr ibn ʿĀmir so that it would serve as a warning to others.[2]

Muʿāwiyah's Letters to Prominent Islamic Figures

Before setting out for Ṣiffīn, Muʿāwiyah told ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ that he intended to write letters to three persons, namely to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, and set them against ʿAlī. But his advisor did not approve of his idea and said, 'There are three possibilities with regard to these three persons. They may be the supporters of ʿAlī, and in this case your letter will add to their support for ʿAlī. They may be the advocates of ʿUthmān, and in this case their advocacy will not be increased; But if they rank among impartial individuals, considering that you are by no means more trustworthy than ʿAlī in their view, your letter will have no influence upon them.'[3]

Muʿāwiyah did not accept his adviser's view and finally wrote a letter, signed by him and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar. The letter read as follows:

> Even if the truth is hidden from us, it is never concealed from you. ʿUthmān was killed by ʿAlī, for the reason that ʿAlī has given protection

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[1] A region to the north of Rujʿah and near Khābūr.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 60–61.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 88–89.

> to his killers. We are seeking revenge for ʻUthmān's blood, so that we shall kill them in conformity with the Qur'an's decree. If ʻAlī turns over ʻUthmān's killers to us, we shall let him alone, and then we shall bring up the issue of the caliphate among Muslims through a council, as in the case of ʻUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb. We have never been, and are not, seeking the caliphate. We are asking you to rise up and assist us in achieving this goal. If we all unite, ʻAlī will be intimidated into retreating.[1]

ʻAbd Allāh ibn ʻUmar's Reply

> ...I swear by my soul that you both have lost your insight and realism and are looking at events from a distance; and your letter added to the doubt of the doubtful. What do you have to do with the caliphate? O Muʻāwiyah! You are a *ṭalīq* (a freed one). O ʻAmr! You are also a suspected and untrustworthy person. Give up this idea because you and I have no assistants.[2]

ʻAbd Allāh ibn ʻUmar's reply to Muʻāwiyah proved the foresight and social knowledge of ʻAmr ibn al-ʻĀṣ and made it clear that Muʻāwiyah had not caught up with his veteran colleague yet. Although Muʻāwiyah was superior with respect to certain political matters (e.g. he patiently listened to his opponents' remarks and forgot about the past when they sided with him and quickly changed the course of discussion and raised a new topic when he reached deadlock in negotiations) he did not yet have adequate knowledge of society.

Muʻāwiyah's Goal behind Writing those Letters

What Muʻāwiyah intended to achieve by writing those letters was to get the support of impartial personalities who did not rank among his supporters and did not appear to be his opponents either. They were influential and respected figures in Medina and Mecca and getting their support would have resulted in the creation of centres of opposition in the two big cities of Mecca and Medina, which were the seat of the *shūrā* (the Islamic council) and the pivot of the selection of the Islamic caliph.

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[1] *Waqʻah Ṣiffīn*, p. 63 (Ibn Qutaybah Dīnawarī believes that Muʻāwiyah wrote this letter to the residents of Mecca and Medina); *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 89.

[2] *Waqʻah Ṣiffīn*, p. 63 (but Ibn Qutaybah refers to another letter as the reply to Muʻāwiyah's letter); *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 89–90.

However, these individuals were not so simple as to be deceived by Mu'āwiyah and take his hand. For this reason, the others – namely, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah – also responded in the same way as 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar.[1]

Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim, in the book *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, refers to another letter from Mu'āwiyah to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar in which the former charges the latter with opposing the Imam, thus trying to sow opposition in his mind. In his letter, Mu'āwiyah further writes, 'I do not mean the caliphate for myself, but I mean it for you, and if you do not accept it either, the issue of the caliphate should be raised before the Islamic council.'

Although 'Umar's son was known for his naivety, he saw through Mu'āwiyah and replied to his letter as follows:

> You have written that I have criticised 'Alī. I swear by my soul that I am by no means on a level with the record of 'Alī's belief and migration and the high regard in which he was held by the Prophet and his firmness in the face of the idolaters. The reason why I did not come to terms with him was because no words had been quoted from the Prophet with respect to this event. Therefore, I refused to lend my support to either side.[2]

Mu'āwiyah's Letter to Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ

The letter written by Mu'āwiyah to Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, the conqueror of the Iranian land, read as follows:

The most competent people to help 'Uthmān were on the council of the Quraysh. They selected him and gave him precedence over others. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr rushed to help him, and they were your colleagues on the council and your equals in Islam. The Mother of the Faithful ('Ā'ishah) also rushed to help him. It is not right for you to disapprove of what they approved of and reject what they accepted. We should return the caliphate to the council.[3]

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[1] The original letter written by Mu'āwiyah to Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah al-Anṣārī and their replies are included by Ibn Qutaybah in *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, pp. 90–91.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 72–73.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 90; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 74.

The Reply of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ

> 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb made those individuals members of the council who could be chosen as caliph. None of us could be selected as caliph unless we voted for him unanimously. If we possessed a virtue, 'Alī possessed that virtue too, not to mention the many virtues that 'Alī has and which we lack. Ṭalḥah and Zubayr would have been better off staying at home. May God forgive the Mother of the Faithful for what she did.[1]

Mu'āwiyah tried to prove in his letter that the third caliph had enjoyed more merits than other council members, but Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ did not accept his argument and attributed 'Uthmān's selection as caliph to the way the council members voted, and he also criticised Ṭalḥah and Zubayr.

Mu'āwiyah's Letter to Muḥammad ibn Maslamah

In this letter, Mu'āwiyah calls him the Helpers' horseman. He writes at the end of his letter: 'The Helpers, who are your relations, degraded 'Uthmān, and God will question you and them on the Day of Judgement.'[2]

The son of Maslamah, in response to Mu'āwiyah, following some initial remarks, explains Mu'āwiyah's intention behind writing his letter as follows: 'You want nothing except the world and follow nothing except your desires. You are defending 'Uthmān now that he is dead, but when he was alive, you degraded him and refused to assist him.'[3]

The Contents of Mu'āwiyah's Letters and his Motives

The contents of Mu'āwiyah's letters were quite provocative, as by highlighting his addressees' strong points the writer tried to incite them to defy the Imam. For instance, he called on the son of 'Umar to appropriate the caliphate for the reason that he had been the council's observer. Also, considering that Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ had been on the six-member council and was on a par with Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, Mu'āwiyah attached importance to his membership of the council and urged him to follow in the footsteps of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. As regards Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, Mu'āwiyah described him as the Helpers' horseman and the mobiliser of the Migrants and suggested that they were expected to make up for their refusal in the past to assist ʿUthmān by rising up for his cause then.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 90; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 75–77.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 90; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 75–77.

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 90; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 75–77.

All these letters indicate that Muʿāwiyah pursued no goal but to undermine the government and pit the Muslim community against Imam ʿAlī. Even if we assume that he had been the one legally entitled to avenge ʿUthmān's murder, pitting Muslims against one another just for the sake of avenging a Muslim's murder would by no means have been justifiable. Muʿāwiyah was insisting that even the caliph was to be selected through the council. The members of the council of ʿUmar did not exceed six in number. If it is accepted that the selection made by the council had to be complied with, then the consensus reached by the Migrants and the Helpers was certainly binding. It is common knowledge that the Imam was chosen as caliph by the Migrants and the Helpers. He was at home when the people stormed his house and took him to the mosque with great insistence and pledged allegiance to him and, except a few, nobody refused to swear allegiance to him.

Besides, it is true that the Migrants and the Helpers did not assist ʿUthmān, but Muʿāwiyah himself did not assist him either, even though the siege of ʿUthmān's house lasted for a long time. Muʿāwiyah was well aware of this siege and could have rushed to assist the caliph with the force that was under his command, but he never did so and simply looked on when ʿUthmān's blood was spilled.

Furthermore, ʿUthmān had personally written a letter to the people of Syria and their ruler Muʿāwiyah and sought assistance from them. He had even written at the end of his letter: 'Help me! Help me! There is no commander but me over you. Hasten! Hasten Muʿāwiyah! Come to my help immediately, as soon as possible.'[1] Nevertheless, Muʿāwiyah ignored this help-seeking letter and extended no assistance at all to the caliph, yet after his death he set out to avenge his blood!

Historians mention two occasions when ʿUthmān's house was besieged and point out that the two occasions were far apart in time. According to some of them, ʿUthmān's house was besieged for forty-nine days, but according to others, the siege of his house lasted for seventy days, or forty days, or more than a month. Therefore, it seems very unlikely that Muʿāwiyah had not been informed about the siege of ʿUthmān's house, and that he had been completely unaware of the incident.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 38.

An Orator in Syria

It is true that at any time and at any place, there are individuals whose lives are characterised by opportunism, and there are flaterring sycophants who utter words just to please the owners of wealth and power and who portray the truth as falsity and vice versa; but there are also brave and upright men throughout history who do not exchange the truth for anything and who speak nothing except the truth.

The members of the tribe of Ṭayy, who lived in a valley midway between Medina and Syria, and who were headed by 'Adī ibn Ḥātim, all loved Imam 'Alī. 'Adī went to see the Imam and told him: 'A man from our tribe called Khifāf is heading for Syria in order to visit his cousin Ḥābis. Khifāf is an eloquent orator and a poet. If you allow me, I shall tell him to meet Mu'āwiyah so that, by elaborating on your status in Medina and Iraq, he will shatter the morale of Mu'āwiyah and the Syrians.' The Imam approved of 'Adī's suggestion. Khifāf left for Syria and called on his cousin Ḥābis and told him that he had been in Medina at the time of 'Uthmān's murder, that afterwards he had accompanied Imam 'Alī from Medina to Kufa, and that he was well informed about what had happened. The conversation between the two cousins resulted in the decision to go to Mu'āwiyah the next day and inform him about the incident. The next day they both called on Mu'āwiyah. Ḥābis introduced his cousin and said that he had witnessed the Yawm al-Dār incident and 'Uthmān's murder and accompanied Imam 'Alī to Kufa, and that he was a completely truthful person. Mu'āwiyah addressed Khifāf and told him: 'Inform us about the incident of 'Uthmān's murder.'

Khifāf described the incident of 'Uthmān's murder in concise remarks. He said: 'Makshūḥ laid siege to his house and a person called Ḥakīm gave the order to attack. Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr and 'Ammār oversaw the murder, and three persons – namely, 'Adī ibn Ḥātim, Ashtar al-Nakha'ī, and 'Amr ibn Ḥamiq – were involved in this incident, as were Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, who invested great effort in this murder, and the most guiltless person in this group is 'Alī, who had no part in 'Uthmān's murder.'

Mu'āwiyah: 'What happened next?'

Khifāf: 'Following 'Uthmān's murder, while his body was still on the ground, the people crowded around 'Alī in such a way that their shoes were lost and their robes fell off their shoulders and the old individuals were trampled underfoot, and they all pledged allegiance to 'Alī as their Imam and caliph. When Ṭalḥah and Zubayr broke their oath of allegiance, the Imam prepared to leave, and the Migrants and the Helpers also left with him briskly. This expedition was disapproved by three persons, namely, Sa'd ibn Mālik, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, and Muḥammad ibn Maslamah, and all three of them secluded themselves. But the first group caused 'Alī to do without these three individuals. On the way the Imam reached the land of Ṭay, and a number of people from our tribe joined him. When the Imam was informed halfway through his journey that Ṭalḥah and Zubayr had headed for Basra, he dispatched a group to Kufa, and they also accepted his invitation and left for Basra. Basra fell and came under his control. Then he set out for Kufa. There was great excitement in this city. The children rushed to his place, and the young and the old went to welcome him happily. He is now in Kufa and has no intention but to conquer Syria.'

When Khifāf's remarks came to an end, Mu'āwiyah was overwhelmed by fear. At this moment, Ḥābis addressed Mu'āwiyah and told him: 'My cousin Khifāf is an ingenious poet. He has recited a poem to me about the discussed incident and changed my attitude towards 'Uthmān and dignified 'Alī.' Mu'āwiyah asked Khifāf to recite his composition to him too. He did so and recited to him his poem, which was extremely dainty and elegant.

Mu'āwiyah's morale was completely shattered after he heard Khifāf's composition. He addressed Ḥābis and told him: 'I think this man is 'Alī's spy. Expel him from Syria as soon as possible.' However, Mu'āwiyah once again summoned Khifāf and asked him to inform him about what the people had done. Khifāf repeated his previous remarks, and Mu'āwiyah was surprised at his wisdom and elegant expression.[1]

Seeking Assistance from the Children of the Prophet's Companions

In the arena of confrontation with the Imam, who enjoyed a very high status with respect to precedence in faith and jihad against idolatry, the son of Abū Sufyān was trying to acquire prestige and reputation by wooing and assembling some of the Prophet's companions and their children.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 64–66; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 110–122.

He was overjoyed to hear that 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Umar had escaped from Imam 'Alī's justice and had arrived in Syria, since the Imam intended to punish him for killing Hurmuzān.[1] Thus, he communicated with his advisor, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, and congratulated him on 'Ubayd Allāh's arrival and regarded it as contributing to his permanent rule over Syria.[2] Then, both decided to ask him to address a gathering from the pulpit and malign 'Alī. When 'Ubayd Allāh met with Mu'āwiyah, he was told by Mu'āwiyah: 'My nephew! You have been named after your father ['Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb]. Look with open eyes and speak with a wide mouth, since you are trusted by the public. Mount the pulpit and swear at 'Alī and testify that he has killed 'Uthmān.'

Such mutinous elements who were at the helm incited the children of the caliphs to commit ugly and reprehensible deeds in order to diminish the Imam's grandeur, but the Imam's personality was so great and prominent that even the enemy could not deny it. 'Ubayd Allāh, who had escaped from the Imam's justice, addressed Mu'āwiyah and said: 'I am not able to speak ill of 'Alī. He is the son of Fāṭimah the daughter of Asad the son of Hāshim. What can I say about his descent? Regarding his physical and spiritual power, suffice it to say that he is a devastating valiant. All I can do is to portray him as responsible for spilling 'Uthmān's blood.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ jumped to his feet and told him: 'I swear by God that at that time, the wounds will open up [i.e. repressed emotions will pour out].' When 'Ubayd Allāh left, Mu'āwiyah addressed 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and said: 'If he had not killed Hurmuzān and had not been afraid of 'Alī's retribution, he would not have come to us. Did you not see how he praised 'Alī?'

Anyway, 'Ubayd Allāh delivered a speech, but when he was about to talk about 'Alī, he stopped talking and said nothing about him and descended the pulpit. Mu'āwiyah sent him a message that read as follows: 'My nephew! Your silence about 'Alī could be due to inability or treachery.' He replied to Mu'āwiyah: 'I did not want to testify against a man who was not at all involved in 'Uthmān's murder, but if I had said that he was, the people would have believed me.' Angered by his reply, Mu'āwiyah ostracised him and did not appoint him to any positions.

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[1] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, pp. 41–42; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 40.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 92.

'Ubayd Allāh, in a composition, somehow modified his previous remark. In his composition, he said: 'Although 'Alī had no part in 'Uthmān's murder, the murderers gathered around him, and he neither praised nor denounced their action. With regard to 'Uthmān, I testify that he was killed while he had repented of his deeds.'[1]

Such flexibility on the part of 'Umar's son was good enough for Mu'āwiyah. Therefore, because of this flexibility, Mu'āwiyah was conciliatory and appointed him as one of his close associates.

The Problem of Delivering 'Uthmān's Killers

Mu'āwiyah's main excuse for raising the flag of defiance and mobilising an army to fight the Imam was the Imam's alleged support for 'Uthmān's Killers.

The reasons for 'Uthmān's murder were previously elaborated. What needs to be mentioned here is the fact that the condition of the attackers and their social status were such that even the Imam was not able to deliver them. It is true that a number of people besieged 'Uthmān's house and some other people killed him, but these individuals had attained such a high status among the public because of the cruelties inflicted by the caliph's Umayyad governors on the people that their deliverance to any authority would have caused a great problem. The following story elucidates this point.

Fighting Imam 'Alī was not something easy. This is why when Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī, a Yemeni ascetic residing in Syria, learned that Mu'āwiyah was preparing to fight the Imam, he went to see Mu'āwiyah with a group of Qur'an reciters. He asked Mu'āwiyah, 'Why do you intend to fight 'Alī, considering that you are not on a level with him in any respect? You do not enjoy his association with the Prophet nor his record in Islam nor his migration and kinship with the Prophet.'

Mu'āwiyah replied, 'I am by no means claiming that I enjoy virtues similar to those of 'Alī, but I would like to ask you: do you know that 'Uthmān was unfairly killed?' They answered in the affirmative. Mu'āwiyah further said, 'If 'Alī delivers his killers over to us so that we may punish them, we shall not fight him.'

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 82–84.

Abū Muslim and his like-minded associates asked Muʿāwiyah to write a letter to Imam ʿAlī. Muʿāwiyah wrote a letter and gave it to Abū Muslim so that he would deliver it to the Imam (the text of Muʿāwiyah's letter and the Imam's reply will be given later).

Abū Muslim arrived in Kufa and delivered Muʿāwiyah's letter to the Imam. Then he stood up and made the following remark:

> You have undertaken a task which – I swear to God – I would never like to be performed by anybody else. But ʿUthmān, being a respectable Muslim, was unfairly killed. Turn over his killers to us, and you will be our commander and leader. If anybody opposes you, our hands shall assist you and our tongues shall testify for you, and thus you will be vindicated.

The Imam did not respond to his remark and only told him to return the next day to receive the reply to his letter. In order to do so, Abū Muslim went to see the Imam the next day and came across a large number of people who had gathered in the mosque of Kufa, and who were all armed to the teeth and chanting that they were the killers of ʿUthmān.

When he called on the Imam, he said, 'I saw a group of people. Are they related to you?' The Imam asked him what he had seen. Abū Muslim replied, 'A number of people have learned that you intend to turn over ʿUthmān's killers to us. Thus, they have gathered together and taken up arms and are chanting that they have all been involved in ʿUthmān's murder.'

Imam ʿAlī told him, 'I swear to God that not even for a moment I intended to deliver them up to you. I considered this issue thoroughly and saw that it was not prudent at all to turn them over to you or to anybody else.'[1]

This event indicates that the killers of ʿUthmān enjoyed a high social status at that time, and that their deliverance to any authority would have resulted in mutiny and great bloodshed.

This association and unity was something natural and had not been ordered at all by the Imam. Otherwise, the Imam, when asked by Abū Muslim whether he knew about the incident, would not have answered in the negative. Abū Muslim, because of his naivety, had disclosed his assignment in an assembly, and the news of his assignment soon spread among the public and caused the revolutionaries (who had become tired of the cruelties inflicted by the third caliph's Umayyad governors and thus spilled his blood) to join and unite. The reason why the Imam stated that he had considered the matter and reached the conclusion that it was not prudent at all to turn them over to the Syrians or others was because any decision about one of them would have provoked them all.

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 85–86; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 15, pp. 74–75.

Besides, it was up to the protectors of 'Uthmān's blood (*awliyā' al-damm*) to call for the killers to be punished. 'Uthmān's *awliyā' al-damm* were his children, not Mu'āwiyah, who was a distant relative of 'Uthmān's, and who was using 'Uthmān's murder as a pretext for his rebellion.

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The Imam Prepares his Army for the Battle of Ṣiffīn

The Imam's (A) Vanguard is Stationed at Nukhaylah

Muʿāwiyah's policy of buying time came to an end and he reaped the profits of sending letters and dispatching emissaries. His military capabilities were improved in the meantime and he dispatched his agents to outlying regions to deceive the Imam's governors and sow discord among his generals.

The Imam (A) assumed the caliphate (just as he had been designated the caliph by the Messenger of God (S)) on 25 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 / 24 June 656[1] and the Migrants and the Helpers pledged allegiance to him. It was in his early days in office that he dispatched Sabrah al-Jahmī to Muʿāwiyah, calling him to obey the central government, but Muʿāwiyah was too conceited to answer his call and simply resorted to intimidation, dispatching messengers and emissaries, accusation, and buying time.

The time was ripe for the Imam (A) to answer Muʿāwiyah's letter by dispatching Abū Muslim al-Khawlānī and for taking decisive measures to uproot that 'bad tree'.[2] It was in early Shawwāl 36 / late May 657 that he decided to launch a campaign against Damascus. He called the Migrants and the Helpers to join him. Acting upon the Qur'anic command: '*Consult them in the affairs*' (3:159). He thus addressed their distinguished men who had immigrated from Medina with the Imam (A) and who accompanied him, 'You are indeed endowed with auspicious judgement, clement people par excellence, those who say the truth, and those who act righteously in our society. We intend to launch an attack on our mutual enemy. We ask for your opinion in this respect.'[1]

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 457; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, Beirut, vol. 2, p. 178.

[2] An allusion to *shajarah khabīthah* in Qur'an 14:26.

Hāshim ibn 'Utbah ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, one of the Migrants, rose up and said, 'O Commander of the Faithful! We know Abū Sufyān's household quite well. They are your enemies and those of your followers. They are the friends of the world seeking people. They wage battle against you solely for worldly gains and power and they leave no stone unturned to achieve their goals. They have taken advantage of 'Uthmān's blood as an excuse to deceive the simple-minded, but they are liars. They do not seek vengeance for his blood, but they seek worldly gains. Send us to mount an attack on them. If they answer the call of truth, so much the better, but if they seek sowing discord and waging battle – and I believe that they only seek discord and battle – we will fight them.'

Another distinguished man from among the Migrants, about whom the Prophet (S) had said, "Ammār is on the side of truth and truth is on the side of 'Ammār and it revolves around him as he turns around'[2] rose up, saying, 'O Commander of the Faithful! Do not delay the campaign even for a single day, if you are able to do as such. Send us to attack the corrupt people before they set the fire of battle ablaze; and make up their mind to resist against, and part with, truth; and call them to that in which lies their happiness. If they answer the call, it will be so much the better, but if they resist, we will fight against them. By God! Shedding their blood and fighting against them will make us close to God and He will grant us His blessings.'

The words of those two prominent figures from among the Migrants shed light, to some extent, on the circumstances. The time was now ripe for the Helpers to voice their opinions. Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah rose up, saying, 'Send us immediately to march on the enemy. By God! Fighting against them will be dearer to us than fighting against Rome, since they resort to concealing their beliefs and humiliating the friends of God [i.e. the Migrants and the Helpers] and their devoted followers. They consider as lawful to seize our possessions and they regard us as their servants.'

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 92.

[2] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, Leiden, vol. 3, p. 187.

Qays ibn Sa'd's swift expression of his opinion was criticised by Khuzaymah ibn Thābit and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī who said, 'It was incumbent on you to exercise patience and to allow the elders to first voice their opinions.' Addressing the chiefs of the Helpers, they said, 'Rise up and answer the Imam who is seeking your opinion.'

Sahl ibn Ḥanīf, a distinguished man from among the Helpers with a brilliant record of deeds, rose up, saying, 'O Commander of the Faithful! We are your friends and the friends of your friends and we are the enemies of your enemies. We follow your judgement. We are your right hand. However, it would be befitting to command the Kufans to join your march and enlighten them on the blessings falling into their share, as they are the inhabitants of this region. If they answer your call, you will achieve your goal. We are not in the least against your judgement. We answer your call whatever you command us to and we follow your orders whenever you command.'[1]

Sahl's words are indicative of his wisdom, as the Migrants and the Helpers supporting the Imam (A) were among the elite Muslims of the *ummah* and their pledging allegiance to the Imam had favourable impressions on the Muslim community. But the Imam's army consisted of Iraqis, the allegiance of whose tribal chiefs was required to muster an army of 100,000 men. The Imam (A) first sought the consultation of the Migrants and the Helpers because they were the founders of his caliphate and they were held in high esteem by the majority of Muslims and it was impossible to have the support of the Iraqis without first seeking their support.

The Speech of the Imam (A)

When the Imam (A) heard Sahl's suggestion, he turned the private consultation session into a large meeting, ascended the pulpit in the presence of the multitude of people, and eloquently said, 'March against the enemies of God, towards the enemies of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, towards the rest of the Confederates [i.e. the allied disbelievers] and those who murdered the Migrants and the Helpers.'

A man from the tribe of Banū Fizār by the name of Arbad rose up, saying, 'Do you intend to send us on a campaign against Syria to wage battle against our brethren, in the manner that you sent us to Basra to fight against our Basran brethren? No! By God, we will not do so.' Mālik al-Ashtar rose up and said, 'Who is this man?' People turned towards Arbad and he fled to the livestock market, fearing for his life. Torrents of angry people rushed to seize him. He was beaten so fiercely that he lost his life under their feet. Hearing the incident, the Imam (A) was upset as Arbad was not supposed to lose his life as a punishment for his impertinence. Islamic justice demanded that the matter be investigated. The result of the investigation was that he had lost his life at the hands of people from the tribe of Hamdān and as he was killed by a group of unidentified perpetrators, rather than a specific murderer, the Imam (A) said, 'It was an instance of "blind murder" as the murderers have not been identified. The victim's blood money should be paid from the public treasury', and he paid it accordingly.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 92–93.

The Speech of Mālik al-Ashtar

The Imam was upset by the surprising incident. He was still saddened despite the fact that he had the victim's blood money paid from the public treasury. Mālik al-Ashtar, an intimate companion of the Imam, rose up and having glorified God, he said, 'Neither be upset by this incident nor lose your hope of victory and support by the words of this wretched traitor. These multitudes of people are all your followers and they do not seek anything but acting upon your command. They do not wish to survive you. We will march against the enemy upon your command. One who fears death will not be delivered from it. Life will not be given to those who seek it. Only the wretched wish to live with the enemy. We know that no one will die unless his time of death arrives. How could we cease from fighting against those whom you consider the enemies of God, the Qur'an, and the prophetic tradition, and the murderers of the Migrants and the believers? A group of them rose against a group of Muslims yesterday [in Basra] and incurred divine wrath and the earth was darkened by their vicious deeds. They exchanged the rewards of the hereafter for this worldly meagre gain.'

Addressing people the Imam (A) said, 'This path is shared by people and people are equal in terms of enjoying rights. One who provides people with wise counsel will be divinely rewarded according to his good intentions. What that man from the tribe of Fizār did came to an end.'[1] He then descended the pulpit and went home.

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[1] Ibid.

The Fifth Column of Muʿāwiyah in the Army of the Imam (A)

Sending infiltrators to military and disciplinary forces and buying army generals and personalities are among the age-old strategies of people in power adopted against their opponents. Abū Sufyān's son excelled others in adopting such strategies. Politics is considered by some people as achieving one's goals through legitimate and illegitimate means and their reasoning is that the end justifies the means. Simple-minded people noticed that Muʿāwiyah was more outwardly successful than ʿAlī (A) and accused the Imam of being ignorant of politics alleging that Muʿāwiyah excelled ʿAlī in politics.

Criticising the views of such people who were ignorant of the principles of Islamic politics, the Imam (A) said, 'By God! Muʿāwiyah is not more versed in politics than I am, but the fact is that he resorts to ploys and committing sins. Had I not been averse to resorting to ploys and deceitfulness, I would have been the most excellent politician of all! The fact is that deceitfulness is a kind of sin and any sin is a kind of disbelief and it will be on the Day of Resurrection that any deceitful man will be recognised by his standard.'[2]

Reference will be made below to a few stances of Muʿāwiyah's ploys in sending infiltrators to the Imam's army. The arousal created by the Imam's sermon delivered upon the pulpit as to waging battle against Muʿāwiyah was indescribable to the extent that Arbad, one of Muʿāwiyah's infiltrators, rose impertinently against the Imam and lost his life under people's feet without his murderer being identified.[3]

Other infiltrators took a lesson out of Arbad's sad fate and resorted to another ploy to undermine the Imam's (A) decision and cast fear into the heart of the Imam by reminding him of the aftermath of the battle whose benefits, they claimed, would be reaped by neither party. Two infiltrators, one from the tribe of ʿAbas (probably a clan of Ghaṭafān) and the other from the tribe of Tamīm, by the names of ʿAbd Allāh and Ḥanẓalah respectively, aiming at sowing discord among the Imam's supporters, pretended to be benevolent and providing people with wise counsels. Each of them succeeded in persuading a number of people from their own tribes to join them and went to visit the Imam (A).

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[1] Ibid.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh's edition), Sermon 195.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 94.

Ḥanẓalah al-Tamīmī was the first to speak to the Imam. 'We have come to visit you out of benevolence and we hope that you welcome our suggestion. We suggest that you exchange messages with that man [i.e. Mu'āwiyah] and do not hasten to confront the Syrians. By God! No one may predict which party will gain victory in such engagement.' 'Abd Allāh al-'Abasī was next to rise and utter similar words. Their words were approved by their company.

The Imam (A) glorified God and thus addressed their suggestion,

> God is the heir of His servants and lands. He is the Lord of the heavens and the seven earths and we will return towards Him. He will bestow rulership on whom He wills. He grants dignity to whom He wills. He humiliates whom He wills. Sinners and those who have been led astray only turn their back to the enemy. By God! I hear the words of people who are never willing to honour the lawful and deny the unlawful.[1]

The Imam (A) thus unmasked the infiltrators and clearly expressed that fighting against Mu'āwiyah was an instance of enjoining good and forbidding wrong, an indubitable obligation incumbent on any Muslim. Those who called him to turn away from fighting against Mu'āwiyah were practically violating those two fundamental principles of the Islamic faith.

Curtains are Raised

Curtains were raised by the words of the Commander of the Faithful (A) and the true intentions of those infiltrators were exposed. Ma'qil al-Riyāḥī said, 'They have not come to meet with you out of benevolence but they have come to visit you to achieve their ungodly wishes. Steer clear of them as they are your bitter enemies.'[2] A man by the name of Mālik said, 'Ḥanẓalah exchanges messages with Mu'āwiyah. Grant us leave to keep him in confinement until the end of the battle.' 'Ayyāsh and Qā'id, two other men from the tribe of 'Abas, said, 'It is reported that 'Abd

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 96; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's Commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 175.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 96; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 175.

Allāh exchanges secret messages with Mu'āwiyah. Arrest him or grant us permission to keep him in confinement until the end of the battle.'[1]

The infiltrators said imploringly, 'Do you reward as such those who hasten to render you support and voice their opinions about you and your enemies?' The Imam (A) said to them, 'God will judge between you and me. I invoke to God to render me aid and deal with you. Those who wish to depart may do so.' The people left. After a lapse of a few days there occurred a dispute between Ḥanẓalah and the chiefs of the tribe of Tamīm; as a consequence, both infiltrators departed Iraq for Syria where they joined Mu'āwiyah. The Imam (A), because of Ḥanẓalah's treachery, ordered the destruction of his home to let others learn a lesson from his fate.[2]

Awaiting Opportunity or Marching on Syria

Army generals and the followers of the Imam (A), except for the companions of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd – whose view will be treated below – were unanimous as to confronting Mu'āwiyah. There were sincere and trustworthy followers of the Imam, such as 'Adī ibn Ḥātim and Zayd ibn Ḥusayn al-Ṭā'ī, who preferred further deliberation suggesting that some solution would be found to the issue through entering into negotiations and exchanging messages.

The Imam was thus addressed by 'Adī, 'O Imam! If you deem it advisable, let us deliberate further on the issue and grant them some respite to allow them to exchange messages with us and your emissaries may have enough time for opening negotiations. If they welcome the suggestions, they will be provided with guidance and maintaining peace will be more advisable for both parties, but if they persist in their obstinacy, grant us leave to march on them.'

However, the majority of 'Alī's (A) army generals sought to march immediately on Syria. Such army commanders as Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arḥabī, Ziyād ibn Naḍr al-Ḥārithī, 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl, and 'Amr ibn Ḥamiq (the last two were distinguished companions of the Prophet), and Ḥujr ibn 'Adī (a distinguished successor of the companions) further persisted on marching on Syria and their sound judgement was reflected in their suggestions.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 96; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 175.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 97; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 176.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Budayl, for instance, suggested that they seek to confront Imam ʿAlī (A) because: (a) they evade the realisation of equality among Muslims and seek preferential treatment in gaining possessions and offices; they ravenously seek to maintain their offices; they are averse to abandon worldly gains; (b) How would it be possible for Muʿāwiyah to pledge allegiance to ʿAlī (A) despite the fact that the Imam took the lives of his brother, maternal uncle, and grandfather at the Battle of Badr? He said: 'By God! I believe that they will never surrender unless their skulls be shattered by spears, their skulls be split asunder by swords, and their brains be smashed by iron rods.'

His suggestions shed light on the fact that any delay in launching a strike would prove to be in their enemy's benefit and against the interests of the Imam (A) and his followers. A follower of the Imam by the name of Yazīd al-Arajī said to him, 'True warriors are unscathed by indolence and drowsiness. They never hesitate over gaining victory.'[1]

Exercising Fortitude in the Face of Wrathfulness

The Imam (A) was notified that ʿAmr ibn Ḥamiq, an eminent companion, and Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī, had dissociated themselves from the Syrians and they curse them. The Imam (A) sent a man to admonish them for their abusiveness. Having heard the Imam's message, they visited him, asking, 'Why did you admonish us for cursing them? Are they not among the followers of falsehood?' The Imam (A) replied, 'Yes, but I do not wish that you curse and slander people. Do not call them bad names, nor tear your ties with them. It would be more effective to mention their misdeeds to them. Instead of cursing them, say, "O God! Protect our and their blood. Make peace between us. Deliver them from error and guide them to the straight path so that those ignorant of our right have the opportunity to be cognizant of it. It would be more favourable to me and better for you."'[2]

ʿAmr and Ḥujr welcomed the Imam's (A) wise counsel and the former thus expressed the reason for his devotion to the Imam: 'I have pledged allegiance to you neither because of our family ties nor for the sake of seeking worldly gain and office, but I sincerely follow you because of five merits of yours. You are the Prophet's cousin; the first man who believed in his divine mission; you are the spouse of the most virtuous woman in this *ummah*; you are the father of the grandsons of the Messenger of God (S); and you excel Migrants in fighting against the enemies of God. By God! Had I been obliged to move lofty mountains and empty the water of rough seas to render aid to your friends and destroy your enemies, I would have accomplished my obligations.'

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 98–102; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 177.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 103; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 181; *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 197; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 155; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, p. 154; *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 102.

When the Commander of the Faithful (A) noticed ʿAmr's sincere devotion, he thus prayed for him, 'O Lord! Illuminate his heart and keep him on the straight path. I wish I had a hundred men like you in my army.' Ḥujr said, 'Had your wish been fulfilled, your army would have improved and fewer unscrupulous people would have found their way to it.'

The Imam's (A) Final Decision

Having heard the suggestions of opponents and proponents – according to the blessed verse: '*consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in God*' (3:159) – he intended to make a decision. He, first of all, ordered that the extra possessions held in trust with governors be collected to be spent on the mobilisation of the army to march on Syria.

The Three Main Pillars of Waging Battle according to Islamic Principles

There are preliminaries to waging battle – in Qur'anic terms, *jihād* and *qitāl* – the most significant of which are the following: (a) courageous and capable forces and personnel; (b) capable commanders; and (c) sufficient funds. Calling people frequently to join the army and answering the call by numerous groups from the tribes inhabiting Iraq fall into the first principle about which the Imam (A) was not concerned.

In order to maintain preparedness, eminent figures – like Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (A), Imam Ḥusayn (A), and the Imam's loyal companions such as ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir – delivered speeches on different occasions. Attending to the second principle, the Imam (A) conveyed messages to worthy people calling them to join the battle. The spirituality and special appeal of the Imam's (A) army attracted the participation of eminent figures, thereby increasing the military power of the army.

He wrote a letter to Mikhnaf ibn Salīm, governor of Isfahan, in which he said,

> Greetings to you. Glorified is God with whom no partners are associated. Those who know are obliged to fight against the people who have turned away from the truth and have sunk into blind-heartedness and error. God is pleased with those who please Him and He is angry with those who disobey Him. We have decided to march on those who act against divine commands, those who have misappropriated public funds, turned away from truth, have displayed their corruption, and have chosen as their confidants the people who have been disobedient to God.
>
> When a friend of God exhibits their unwarranted innovations, he will be considered as an enemy, he will be sent into exile, and he will be deprived of his share of public funds. When a wrongdoer renders them aid in their wrongdoing, they befriend him and render him assistance as a close friend. They persist in doing wrong and they are intent on their disobedience [to divine laws]. They have been as such since early times aiming to impede people from treading the path of truth and thus have a hand in the propagation of sinfulness and injustice.
>
> Upon the receipt of my letter, entrust your affairs to the most trustworthy individual and hasten towards us. You may confront this deceitful enemy and succeed in enjoining good and forbidding wrong. We are not needless of you in reaping the rewards of fighting against the enemy.[1]

When the Imam's (A) letter, transcribed by his scribe, 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfi', was received by the governor of Isfahan, the governor immediately chose two close companions of his and entrusted the affairs of Isfahan to Ḥārith ibn Abī al-Ḥārith and the affairs of Hamadan – that was politically subordinate to Isfahan in those days – to Sa'īd ibn Wahb, and departed to meet the Imam (A). He was martyred in the battle, as predicated by the Imam ('We are not needless of you in reaping the rewards of fighting against the enemy').[2]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 104–106; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 182–183.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 104–106; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 182–183.

Mikhnaf was not the only commander or governor invited by the Imam (A) to participate in the battle, but he sent a message to Ibn 'Abbās in Dhū al-Qa'dah 37 / April 658 and made a request to send him the extra funds of the public treasury. The Imam (A) reminded Ibn 'Abbās of meeting the demands of people around him and send the extra funds to Kufa. It is to be noted that the funds from Kufa were not sufficient for mobilisation and he must have sought assistance from other provinces as well.[1]

Boosting the Morale of the Armed Forces

The Imam was not pressed for forces, since he held control over the majority of Muslim lands. Nevertheless, infiltrators and cowards caused instability and desperation to dissuade the Imam's warriors from treading the path of truth. As a result, the Imam (A) and his honourable sons, Imam Ḥasan (A) and Imam Ḥusayn (A), boosted the morale of their warriors by delivering speeches and sermons until the forces departed from the camp at Nukhaylah. Their speeches are recorded in historical sources.[2]

Eminent figures and seekers of martyrdom, such as Hāshim ibn 'Utbah ibn Waqqās (Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ' nephew), delivered speeches and insisted that the Imam immediately send them to march on those who had turned away from the Book of God and had distorted divine laws. His speech was so passionate that the Imam thus prayed for him: 'O Lord! Grant him martyrdom and the company of your prophet; may God bless him and his family.'[3] Hāshim was the Imam's standard-bearer in the Battle of Ṣiffīn and was martyred in the last days of the battle.

Freedom in Choosing the Path

A number of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd's[4] supporters visited the Imam (A) and said to him, 'We depart with you and set up our camp at a distance from you in order to supervise your activities and those of your opponents. We will fight against those of you who violate the laws.' The Imam's (A) life and career were never subject to doubt, but they had been tempted by infiltrators who had cast doubt in the hearts of the righteous in order to dissuade them from confronting Mu'āwiyah's forces. As a consequence, the Imam (A) said to them, 'Well done! Your words are indicative of your understanding the principles of religion and your knowledge of the prophetic tradition. Those disapproving of your words are treacherous wrongdoers.'

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 104–106; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 182–183.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 112–115.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 184.

[4] 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd was one of the memorisers of the Qur'an and an early convert to Islam. His opposition to 'Uthmān is a long story. He died in Medina in 32 AH / 653 CE and mobilisation for the Battle of Ṣiffīn began in late 658 CE, at a time when his

Another group of the followers of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd's visited the Imam (A), saying, 'Your merits and virtues are indubitable, but we doubt as to the legitimacy of this battle. If we are supposed to fight the enemy, send us to farther regions to confront the enemies of Islam.' The Imam (A) who was not upset about their resorting to such an excuse sent them along with 400 men under the commandership of Rabī' ibn Khuthaym al-Thawrī to serve in Rayy and fight in the vicinity of Khurāsān.[1]

The Imam (A) knew that the tribe of Bāhilah had strained relations with him; similarly, he exempted them from fighting in that battle, paid their salary, and sent them to Daylam to serve on the side of their Muslim brethren in that region.[2]

Distinguished Commanders of the Imam's (A) Army

The majority of the Imam's (A) followers were from Kufa, Basra, and some of them were the Yemeni tribesmen inhabiting the vicinity of those two cities. He appointed five commanders for the five tribes who accompanied Ibn 'Abbās from Basra to Nukhaylah (the camp at Kufa):

Khālid ibn Mu'ammar al-Sadūsī over the tribe of Bakr ibn Wā'il;
'Amr ibn Marjūm al-'Abdī over the tribe of 'Abd al-Qays;
Ṣabrah ibn Shaymān al-Azdī over the tribe of Azd;
Aḥnaf ibn Qays over Tamīm, Ḍabbah, and Rubāb;
Sharīk ibn A'war over 'Āliyah.

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adherents, having learnt the Qur'an and Islamic laws from him, still survived. See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, Beirut, vol. 3, p. 160.

[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 184.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 116.

All those commanders had accompanied Ibn 'Abbās from Basra to Kufa and Ibn 'Abbās had entrusted the affairs of Basra to Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī and accompanied the Imam (A) on the journey.[1] The Imam (A) appointed seven commanders – whose names are recorded in historical sources – over the seven tribes of Kufa whose multitude surged at Nukhaylah.[2]

Dispatching the Vanguard of the Army

Having appointed the commanders, the Imam (A) appointed 'Uqbah ibn 'Amr al-Ansārī – an early convert to Islam who had pledged allegiance to the Prophet (S) at 'Aqabah – as his deputy and put his forces on alert. When the camp at Kufa was surging with Muslim forces, a group of people who had been exiled to Kufa by 'Uthmān on the charge of voicing their opposition to him, assembled and shouted the slogan: 'The time is ripe for "those who were expelled from their homes"[3] to be prepared for fighting against the enemy.'[4]

The Imam (A) dispatched a vanguard battalion of 12,000 men to Syria and entrusted the command of 8,000 men to Ziyād and that of 4,000 men to Hānī. He instructed both commanders to proceed together in an orderly manner towards Syria and to set up their camps where they encounter the enemy.[5]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 117; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 194.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 121. In *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 384) the name is recorded as Abā Mas'ūd 'Uqbah ibn 'Āmir al-Ansārī.

[3] There are three places in the Qur'an where this phrase is used. See Qur'an 3:195; 22:40; 59:8. [Translator]

[4] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 121.

[5] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, p. 144; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 4, p. 237.

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Imam ʿAlī (A) Marches towards the Battlefield at Ṣiffīn

A multitude of freely volunteering and courageous warriors joined the camp in Nukhaylah as they were eager to receive orders to proceed. The Imam (A) finally entered the camp on Wednesday 5 Shawwāl 38 / 27 March 657 and thus addressed the army:

> Glorified is God when night falls and the world sinks into darkness. Glorified is God when a star rises or sets. Glorified is God whose bounties are infinite, unequalled, and unmerited. O people! I dispatched the vanguard (*muqaddimah*) of my army[1] and commanded them to await my orders by the Euphrates. Now, it is time that we crossed the river and approached the Muslims inhabiting the banks of the Tigris, those who will accompany you on your march to the enemy.[2] I have appointed ʿUqbah ibn Khālid[3] as the governor of Kufa. I have not abandoned you [I have not preferred myself over you]. No one is supposed to stay behind. I have ordered Mālik ibn Ḥabīb al-Yarbūʿī to march towards the violators and those planning to stay behind.[4]

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[1] The Imam (A) had dispatched twelve thousand men under the command of Ziyād ibn Naḍr and Shurayḥ ibn Hānī.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 48; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 131 (with minor variations). The Imam (A) delivered this sermon at the camp of Nukhaylah in the vicinity of Kufa on 25 Shawwāl 37 / 5 April 658; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 201.

[3] For details on ʿUqbah ibn ʿĀmir, see *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 384.

[4] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 132.

Maʿqil ibn Qays al-Riyāḥī, a courageous and fervent man, rose up, saying, 'By God! The violators are nothing but doubtful and those lagging behind are nothing but hypocrites. It would be far better to have Mālik ibn Ḥabīb behead the violators.' The Imam (A) replied, 'He has received the required orders and by the grace of God he will not violate my orders.' Some others were about to offer him their suggestions but he (A) did not grant them permission. He asked for his horse and as he set his foot in the stirrup, he said, '*In the name of God*'. Mounting his horse, he said, '*Immaculate is He who has disposed this for us, and we [by ourselves] were no match for it. Indeed, we shall return to our Lord*' (Qur'an 43:13–14).

The Imam (A) further said, 'O Lord! I seek refuge in you from the hardships of the journey, the grief of return, perplexity following certitude, and those who envy [my] family and possessions. O Lord! You are the companion on the journey and the executor [entrusted with the execution of a will] for the family. Both these qualities may but be found in You, since an executor may not keep company and a companion may not be an executor.'

He stirred his mount to move as Ḥurr ibn Sahm al-Ribʿī was riding his horse ahead of him, reciting poetry on manliness and dignity. It was at that time that Mālik ibn Ḥabīb, the Imam's (A) head of guard, held the rein of his master's mount and said sorrowfully, 'O Imam! Is it fair that you are departing with Muslims to make battle and be divinely rewarded for it and leave me here to assemble the violators?' He replied, 'You will have a share of the divine rewards of the warriors, but you will be more efficient here than accompanying us in our campaign.' Ibn Ḥabīb said, 'I obey your command, Commander of the Faithful (A).'[1]

The Imam (A), accompanied by his army, departed Kufa and as he was crossing the bridge of Kufa he turned to the people, saying, 'Those who have come here to see us off and those who reside in this area need to perform full prayers; but we, as travellers, and those accompanying us, need not fast and must shorten prayers.'

He departed after establishing a two-*rakʿah* prayer at noon. He performed his afternoon prayer when he reached the monastery of Abū Mūsā, about six kilometres from Kufa. Having performed his prayer he supplicated: 'Glorified is God, the Possessor of bounties and blessings. Glorified is God, the Almighty, the Bountiful. I invoke Him to make me content with His decree and successful in obedience to Him and His decree, as He answers supplications.'[1]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 132–134.

He departed and upon reaching Thars, a major tributary of the Euphrates, he stopped to perform the evening prayer. In his supererogatory prayer, he said, 'Glorified is God who makes the alternation of days and nights. Glorified is God when the night falls. Glorified is God when a star rises or sets.'[2] He rested there until daybreak and, having performed the dawn prayer, he departed. Upon his arrival at Qubbah Qubbīn, he saw tall palm trees beyond a river. He recited this blessed verse of the holy Qur'an: '*and tall date palms with regularly set spathes*' (50:10). He crossed the river on horse and rested beside a synagogue.[3]

The Imam (A) passes through Karbala

On his route from Kufa to Ṣiffīn the Imam (A) passed through Karbala. Harthamah ibn Sulaym is reported as saying, 'The Imam dismounted in Karbala and performed prayer with us. Having finished his prayer he took a fistful of earth from the ground, smelled it, and said, "Good for you, earth of Karbala for some people will be raised from you and they will enter paradise without their deeds being reckoned." Then, he pointed to two spots, saying "Here and there."'

Saʿīd ibn Wahb is reported as asking the Imam (A), 'What do you intend to say?'

He replied, 'A highly respected family will come to this land. Woe unto them because of you. Woe unto you because of them.'

We inquired, 'What do you intend to say?'

He replied, 'Woe unto them because of you as you will slay them. Woe unto you because of them since they will make you enter the hellfire because of your slaying them.'[4]

Ḥasan ibn Kathīr narrates from his father that the Imam (A) said in Karbala, '[This is] the land of sorrow and trial.' He then pointed to a particular spot and said, 'They will dismount there where their mounts will rest.' Pointing to another spot, he said, 'They will be slain there.'

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 135.

[4] Ibid., pp. 140–142; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 169–170.

Harthamah, the first narrator, is reported as saying, 'The Battle of Ṣiffīn came to an end and I returned to my abode and related to my wife, a follower of the Imam (A), what he had said in Karbala. I asked her, "How was he acquainted with the unseen?" She replied, "Leave me. The Imam says nothing but the truth." After a while, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād dispatched a great army against Ḥusayn and I was in that army. Having reached Karbala I recalled the Imam's words and I was deeply grieved by them. I rushed on horseback to Ḥusayn and communicated to him the Imam's predictions. He asked, "Now, are you with us or against us?" I replied, "Neither. I have left my family in Kufa and I fear Ibn Ziyād." He said, "Leave this land at this moment, since, by God in whose Hand lies Muḥammad's (S) life, he who hears our cries for help and does not come to our aid will be divinely cast into the hellfire." Therefore, I immediately left that spot so as I would not see the day of martyrdom.'[1]

The Imam (A) in Ṣābāṭ and Madā'in

On his route from Karbala to Sābāṭ, the Imam (A) reached Bahrasīr where no vestiges of Khusraw II were to be found. A companion of the Imam, Ḥurr ibn Sahm,[2] recited two lines from Abū Ya'far:

The autumn wind blew over their abode,

as if their time was over.[3]

Imam 'Alī (A) asked him, 'Why did you not recite these [Qur'anic] verses? *"How many gardens and springs did they leave behind! Fields and splendid places, And the bounties wherein they rejoiced! So, it was; and We bequeathed them to another people. So, neither the sky wept for them, nor the earth; nor were they granted any respite."* (44:25–29)'

The Imam (A) added, 'The second group were also inheritors, but they were succeeded by other inheritors. If they fail to show gratitude for blessings, they will be deprived of them because their disobedience.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 140–141; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 169.

[2] His name is also recorded as Ḥurayz, see *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 142 in the notes.

[3] Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī's *Dīwān*, p. 27. [Translator]

Beware of ingratitude against blessings so as you may not be beset by misery.' He commanded his army to be stationed in a higher area in that vicinity. Having dismounted in an area in the vicinity of Madā'in, he issued an order to be communicated by Ḥārith ibn A'wār to the people in the town as to which those able to fight were obliged to meet with the Commander of the Faithful (A) in the evening.

It was in the evening that the Imam (A) addressed those who had come to visit him. He opened his address with the glorification of God and then said, 'I am perplexed by your failure to participate in the battle in the cause of God, by your separation from the inhabitants of this region, and by your residing in the land of wrongdoers. You neither enjoin good nor do you forbid wrong.'[1]

The village heads and the lesser members of the feudal nobility of Madā'in said, 'We are looking forward to hearing and obeying your command. Command as you wish.' The Imam (A) ordered 'Adī ibn Ḥātim to stay there and accompany them on their way to Ṣiffīn. Accompanied by three hundred men, 'Adī departed for Madā'in after three days. He asked his son, Yazīd, to stay there and join the Imam (A) to be accompanied by the second group. He did likewise as he led four hundred men.[2]

The Imam (A) is Welcomed by the Village Heads in Anbār

The Imam (A) departed Madā'in for Anbār. Informed of his arrival, the inhabitants of that region hastened to welcome him. Some of the people held conversations with the Imam (A). When they saw him, they dismounted their horses and made a display of their humility before him. The Imam (A) inquired, 'What is it that you are doing? Why have you brought these quadrupeds?' They replied, 'This is the manner wherewith we pay homage to our superiors [from the times of Persian rule] and these quadrupeds are our gifts to you. We have prepared food for you and your army and also fodder for your mounts and [more] quadrupeds.'

> The Imam (A) said, 'What you regard as your way of paying homage to your superiors is not, by God, in their best interest and whereby you only take trouble in vain. Turn away from so doing. As to the

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 142; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 202–203.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 143; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 203.

> quadrupeds which you have brought, I will accept them upon your satisfaction, provided that they are reckoned as tribute and tax. As to the food which you have prepared for us, I will accept provided that you receive its price.'
>
> The people of Anbār said, 'Please accept them and we will calculate the cost and will charge you for them.' The Imam (A) said, 'Then you will charge me less than the market price!'
>
> They inquired, 'O Imam! We have friends and acquaintances among Arabs. Do you forbid us from providing them with gifts and do you forbid them from accepting our gifts?'
>
> The Imam (A) said, 'All Arabs are your friends, but everybody is not worthy to accept your expensive gifts. Let us know if anyone exhibits enmity towards you.'
>
> The people asked, 'O Imam! Accept our gifts. We would like you to accept our gifts.'
>
> The Imam (A) said, 'Woe unto you! Our needs are less than yours.' Then, he went on his way, having imparted divine justice to those who had suffered for long the tyranny of Persian kings who had robbed them of the fruits of their endeavours.[1]

Upon the Imam's (A) arrival at al-Jazīrah, he was welcomed by the tribes of Taghlib and Nimr. The Imam (A) only allowed one of his generals, Yazīd ibn al-Qays, to partake of their food and water, as he was a descendant of those tribes.

When he reached the land of Raqqah, he dismounted on the bank of the Euphrates, where a monk resided in his monastery. Having been informed of the Imam's (A) arrival, he went to him and said, 'We have inherited an epistle from our ancestors which was written by the apostles of Christ. I have brought it to read it to you.'

> Then, he began reading, 'In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. It is the divine decree that a prophet will be appointed from among an unlettered people. He will teach them the Book and Wisdom. He will guide them unto the path of God. He will call people to embrace monotheism in marketplaces. He will not chastise evil by

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 144; *Nahj al-Balāghah, Bāb al-Ḥikam*, no. 36 (abridged); Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 203.

> vicious deeds but he will forgive them. His followers will glorify God and praise Him in any elevated place and in any rising and prostration. They utter, at all times, the glorification of God and praise Him as the Greatest.
>
> ‘God will make him triumphant over his enemies. When God appoints him as the prophet, his followers will branch into two sects, but they will reunite later. They will remain in that state of union before they divide into two sects again. He will enjoin good and will forbid wrong. He will judge based on the truth and justice and will not accept bribes nor be remunerated for his justice. The world will be of less value to him than some ash dispersed by a harsh wind and death will be more pleasing to him than quenching thirst by the thirsty.
>
> ‘He fears God inwardly but is sincerely devoted to Him outwardly. He never fears any censure in his obedience to divine commands. The inhabitants of this region living in the times of that prophet and those believing in him will be rewarded by my satisfaction and by being admitted to paradise. He who lives in the times of that righteous servant of God, renders him support, and he who loses his life in his cause will be a martyr…’

Having completed reading the epistle, the monk added, ‘I am at your service from now on and I will not part with you until I share your fate.’ The Imam (A) wept and said, ‘Glorified is God who has not made me one of those who have been consigned into oblivion. Praise be to God has made me among the beneficent.’

The monk accompanied the Imam (A) from that time onwards until he was martyred in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. The Imam (A) performed the funeral prayer before his dead body and buried him. He said, ‘This [man] is from our household (*ahl al-bayt*).’ He frequently asked divine forgiveness for him.[1]

The Imam (A) in the Land of Raqqah

Before his departure from Madā’in, the Imam (A) dispatched three thousand men, led by Maʿqil ibn Qays, to Raqqah.[2] He ordered Maʿqil to pass by Mawṣil and Naṣībīn and dismount in Raqqah to meet with him. The Imam (A) took another route to Raqqah. He seemingly dispatched that army to stabilise the governorship of that region. As a result, he ordered the commander not to fight anyone but to instead give hope to the inhabitants of those regions and to establish peace therein. He also commanded him to lead the army in the morning and in the evening, but rest at noon and late in the evening (as God created night for rest) and thus provide the army and the mounts with comfort and security.

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 147–148; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd’s commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 205–206.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 144; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 237.

Having followed the course advised by the Imam (A), the army commander arrived at Raqqah after the Imam (A).[1]

Dispatching a Letter to Mu'āwiyah from Raqqah

The Imam's (A) companions advised him to dispatch a letter to Muʿāwiyah and once again issue an ultimatum to him. The Imam (A) welcomed their suggestion as he was interested in warding off, without bloodshed, Muʿāwiyah's rebellion despite him knowing that the power-thirsty politician would not be affected by good counsel and admonition. Having received the Imam's (A) letter, Muʿāwiyah threatened to fight against him.[2] As a consequence, the Imam (A) took a stronger course of action by commanding his army to depart from Raqqah to Ṣiffīn.

Crossing the Euphrates by Constructing a Bridge

The problem facing the Imam (A) was crossing the wide Euphrates, a task which was impossible without constructing a bridge or by joining ships and boats together. The Imam (A) asked the people of Raqqah to provide him and his army with the means to cross the Euphrates, but, unlike the Iraqis, inhabitants of that frontier city did not hold the Imam (A) in high esteem and withheld assistance. Despite his power, the Imam (A) did not react against their uncooperativeness, but decided to cross the river, accompanied by his army, at a farther place named Manbij.

It was at that time that Mālik al-Ashtar threatened them in a loud voice that the castle in which they had sought refuge would be demolished. The people of Raqqah said to one another that Mālik would undoubtedly stand by his word. Therefore, they immediately declared their readiness to construct a bridge on which the Imam (A) and his infantry, carrying their possessions and equipment, eventually crossed. Mālik was the last person to depart from that region.[1]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 148; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 208.

[2] The Imam's (A) letter and Muʿāwiyah's reply are to be found in *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 150 and Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 210–211.

The Imam (A) in Syria

Having crossed the Euphrates, the Imam (A) departed Iraq for Syria. He appointed two of his powerful commanders, Ziyād ibn Naḍr and Shurayḥ ibn Hānī, as the leaders of the vanguard (*muqaddimah*), as they had come to Kufa, to advance on Muʿāwiyah's army and ward off any raids or ruses that could be carried out by Muʿāwiyah. The two generals confronted Muʿāwiyah's vanguard, led by Abū al-Aʿwar at Sūr al-Rūm, and made attempts to encourage the latter by peaceful means to obey the Imam's (A) command. When their endeavours proved futile, the two commanders dispatched a fast messenger, Ḥārith ibn Jumhān al-Juʿfī, to the Imam (A), reporting the developments and requesting his orders.[2]

Upon the receipt of the letter, the Imam (A) imparted Ziyād and Shurayḥ's report to Mālik and asked him to assume the leadership of both armies immediately but advised him to refrain from carrying out any early attack without having a meeting with the enemy and hearing their words. He also advised him not to launch any early strike solely because of his anger at the enemy, but told him to hear their words on different occasions and issue an ultimatum to them.

The Imam (A) ordered Mālik to appoint Ziyād and Shurayḥ as the leaders of the right and left flanks and advised him to assume the leadership of the central brigade. He also advised him to neither approach the enemy so that they might think that he was about to launch an attack, nor keep distance from them that they might think that he feared them, but he was supposed to stay there until he would be joined by him.[3]

The Imam (A) thus replied to the letter of his commanders and made a reference to al-Ashtar's good qualities: 'Both commanders need to know that I appointed Mālik as the overall in command of the army. Listen to him and obey his commands, since he is not a man for whose shallowness and errors we need to entertain any fear. He is neither a person to tarry when swiftness is required nor one to hasten when delicacy is needed. I have issued a command to him similar to what I have issued to you that he is not supposed to fight the enemy without having called them to acknowledge the truth and without having issued an ultimatum to them.'

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 151–154; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 211–213; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 144; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 238.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 151–154; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 211–213; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 144; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 238.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 151–154; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, pp. 211–213; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 144; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 238.

Mālik hastened to reach the spot wherein the vanguards of both armies had confronted. He organised his forces and he did nothing thereafter but to defend the army and whenever Abū al-Aʿwar, the Syrian commander, launched a strike he would ward it off. He amazingly conveyed a message to Muʿāwiyah via the commander of the Syrian army that if the former was intent on military engagement, he should set foot in the field in person and would fight him rather than cause bloodshed for others. Muʿāwiyah did not respond to the message until the Syrian army retreated hastily at night and camped in a vast land beside the shore of the Euphrates, and withheld the Imam's (A) vanguard from having access to water.

Muʿāwiyah's Advance on Ṣiffīn

Muʿāwiyah was notified that ʿAlī (A) had constructed a bridge on the Euphrates in Raqqah and he and his large army had crossed the river. Having already primed the Syrians, he ascended the pulpit, notified the people of the Imam's (A) arrival accompanied by his Basran and Kufan troops, and indulged in encouraging them to defend their lives and those of their families. His words were further confirmed by individuals who had been trained for the task. Finally, Muʿāwiyah, accompanied by people with military capability,[1] proceeded towards his vanguard, led by Abū al-Aʿwar, and camped where they had stationed. It is reported that he dispatched forty thousand men to withhold the Imam's (A) army from approaching the Euphrates.[2]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 154; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 238.

[2] In his *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, Ibn Muzāḥim records that Muʿāwiyah's army numbered one hundred and thirty thousand, but Masʿūdī in *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 384) states that the number, as unanimously recorded by historians, was eighty-five thousand. It is also reported in *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn* (p. 157) that ʿAlī's (A) army consisted of one hundred

Imam's (A) Arrival at Ṣiffīn

The Imam (A) before long arrived in Ṣiffīn with a large army and joined his vanguard, led by Mālik al-Ashtar. He entered Ṣiffīn when the large enemy army had been stationed on the banks of the Euphrates and his army had been withheld from having access to the river.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAwf reports that the water supply of the Imam's army was running out since Muʿāwiyah's vanguard cavalry and infantry, led by Abū al-Aʿwar, had blocked the path to the river. Archers were stationed before the vanguard and they were surrounded by spearmen and soldiers in armour. Finally, suffering from thirst, the Imam's (A) army complained to him.[1]

The Imam's (A) Forbearance

Any ordinary commander may lose his patience in such circumstances and may issue an order to launch an attack on the enemy. Nonetheless, the Imam (A), who had, from the beginning, been intent on resolving the issue without bloodshed, summoned Ṣaʿṣaʿah ibn Ṣawḥān,[2] a close companion of his, to send him as an emissary to Muʿāwiyah to say to him, 'We have come to this region and we do not like to launch an attack before issuing an ultimatum. You have come from Syria with your forces and means in their entirety and you have launched an early strike on us. We suggest that you desist from your strike and listen to our reasoning. It is so unmanly that you have withheld us from having access to water. Remove the impediments and think about our suggestion. If you intend to maintain the status quo which leads people to fight for water and finally the victorious will have access to water, we will have nothing more to suggest.'

Ṣaʿṣaʿah, functioning as the Imam's (A) emissary, entered Muʿāwiyah's tent among the central brigade and conveyed the Imam's (A) message to him. Cold-hearted people like Walīd ibn ʿUtbah favoured the siege on the Euphrates so as to ensure the Imam's army would perish of thirst. ʿAmr

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thousand, or slightly more than that, and the number of ʿAlī's (A) army is recorded in *Murūj al-Dhahab* as ninety thousand.

[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 94; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 239; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 145; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 187.

[2] As reported by Ibn Qutaybah and al-Ṭabarī, the Imam (A) dispatched Ashʿath; see *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 94; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 240.

ibn al-ʿĀṣ, the cunning military strategist, unlike the Umayyads, said to Muʿāwiyah, 'Allow the army to have access to water and reflect on other military matters.' He is also reported as saying, 'It is not practical that you take your fill of water and leave ʿAlī in thirst, when his army stare at the Euphrates. They will either make their way to water or perish in their attempt. You know that ʿAlī is a valiant and fierce warrior and he is accompanied by the people of Iraq and Hejaz. ʿAlī is such man that when Fāṭimah's home was attacked he said that had he been supported by forty men he would have taken his revenge on the transgressors.'

Muʿāwiyah considered it a victory that he had withheld the Imam's (A) army from having access to water, but a pious man from Hamdān, an eloquent man and a friend of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, turned to Muʿāwiyah, saying, 'Glorified is God. You have come from Syria and positioned yourself here earlier yet it would be insensitive to deprive them of water. By God! Had they reached here earlier, they would not have treated you as such. You will at most withhold water from them temporarily. Be prepared for the day when you will taste a dose of your own medicine. Do you know not that there are men and women slaves as well as labourers, and weak and innocent people among them? O Muʿāwiyah! Your vicious deed has enlightened the timid and the doubtful and those who had not been against you have been emboldened to stand against you.'[1]

Contrary to his usual disposition of tolerating criticism, he censured the pious man from Hamdān and complained about him to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ. He was censured by the latter's son who was an acquaintance of the pious man. However, the pious man was so fortunate that he regarded Muʿāwiyah's army so unfortunate and he joined the Imam's (A) army when the night fell.

Issuing the Command to Strike and Shatter the Impediments

The Imam's (A) army was threatened by thirst and lack of water and the Imam's (A) face was clouded with grief. He heard a soldier reciting these lines beside the flags of the tribe of Madhḥij:

Are Syrians withholding water from us

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 160; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 94, with minor variations; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 188; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 240.

when we are in armour and equipped with spears?'[1]

Approaching the flag of the tribe of Kindah, he heard a soldier reciting these lines of Ashʿath ibn Qays beside the tent of the commander of his tribe:

If Ashʿath does not remove today the grief of death
from the people sunk into harm and wrong,
we will drink water from the Euphrates by his sword.
It would be better, Ashʿath, to leave at our disposal the people,
who used to be and are now losing their lives.[2]

Having heard the verses recited aloud by those soldiers in their camps, the Imam (A) returned to his tent. Ashʿath arrived of a sudden and asked, 'Is it fair that Syrians withhold the water of the Euphrates from us when you are among us and as we are carrying our swords? Allow us, by God, to either open our way to the Euphrates or lose our lives in this cause. Command al-Ashtar to position his soldiers wherever you deem appropriate.'

The Imam (A) said, 'It is your choice.' Then, he specified the spot wherein al-Ashtar was supposed to position his army and delivered a speech to the large army. His speech was so fiery and rousing that the Imam's (A) army, like a thunderbolt, managed to shatter the resistance of Muʿāwiyah's army and occupied the watering place by the Euphrates.

The speech was as follows: 'Muʿāwiyah's army has called you to counter their move [i.e. their move to withhold you from having access to water]. Now you have two alternatives: either endure humility and stay where you are, or quench the thirst of your swords by their blood so that you quench your thirst. Death lies in your life accompanied by defeat and life lies in your victorious death. Beware that Muʿāwiyah has brought with himself a group of unaware and astray people and has concealed the truth from them behind the veil of hypocrisy so that they (ignorantly) stick out their necks as targets of arrows and swords.'[3]

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[1] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 385; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 164–166.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 385; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 164–166.

[3] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 51; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 244.

Ash'ath declared on the same night to the soldiers under his command that those who sought either water or death should meet him in the morning.[1]

Thirst, rousing speech, and moving poetry pressed twelve thousand men to declare their readiness to occupy the banks of the Euphrates. Ash'ath, accompanied by his large battalion, and al-Ashtar, along with his powerful cavalry, confronted the enemy's army, numbering twice their number. They launched a lightening strike and opened their way to the Euphrates so much so that the horses of the cavalry entered the river. Seven men were slain by al-Ashtar and five others were killed by Ash'ath. Victory was on the side of the Imam (A) and the banks of the large river were captured by the Imam (A) and his companions.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked Mu'āwiyah, 'Do you think that 'Alī will retaliate by withholding you from having access to water?' Aware of the Imam's (A) moral nobilities and commitment to Islamic values, Mu'āwiyah replied, 'I think he will not withhold us from having access to water, even though he has come to achieve another goal.'[2]

Now, let us see the Imam's (A) reaction against the unmanliness of Abū Sufyān's son.

Commitment to Morality at the Zenith of Power

It was through employing special military tactics that the banks of the Euphrates were captured by the Imam's (A) army and they had full access to the water of that river. Mu'āwiyah's army had to retreat from that area and had to be stationed in a higher place which was arid. The Syrians noticed that they could not survive given their shortage of water. They had to opt for one of the following options:

1. to launch a strike and reoccupy the banks of the river; nevertheless, they did not consider themselves that courageous or powerful;
2. to perish of thirst and be buried in Ṣiffīn;
3. to flee from that area and scatter in Syria and its adjacent regions.

Nonetheless, the chiefs of the Syrian army, Mu'āwiyah in particular, were not that afraid of losing the banks of the Euphrates to the Imam's (A) army, since they were aware of the Imam's (A) magnanimity, manliness, and commitment to moral principles and Islamic values. They knew that the Imam (A) would never sacrifice moral principles for the sake of matters of less significance and he believed that ends would not justify the means.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 166; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 94.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, pp. 386–387.

Commitment to morality and sublime values stem from the divinely inspired soul of any magnanimous human being. These principles are desired in all circumstances, irrespective of being at peace or war. The point is that such principles are directly intertwined with human relations in one's entire lifetime.

The guidelines set by the Prophet (S) as to dispatching the Muslim armies and the outcomes of ʿAlī's (A) participation in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, some of which will be touched upon below, indicate that human principles should not be sacrificed for the sake of attaining one's goals, but one has to be committed to moral values even in dire circumstances.

The fact that the chiefs of Muʿāwiyah's army were not that concerned about the occupation of the banks of the Euphrates by the Imam's (A) army is reflected in the negotiations held by the two cunning strategists (i.e. Muʿāwiyah and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ).

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ totally opposed Muʿāwiyah's inhumane act, but the latter acted in contrary to common sense, the consequence of which was that the river banks were captured by the Imam's (A) army and that the army of Muʿāwiyah had no other alternative but to retreat to a safe distance from the banks.

It was at that time that those two cunning and vicious strategists held conversations, the themes of which will be summarised below.

> ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ asked, 'What would you do if the Iraqis prevented you from having access to water as you did likewise? Would you launch an attack on them to open your way towards the river banks in the manner that they launched a strike against you to achieve the same goal?'
>
> Muʿāwiyah replied, 'Let what has passed be pass. What do you think of ʿAlī?'
>
> ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, 'I think he will not give you a dose of your own medicine, since he has not come to occupy the river banks.'[1]

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 94; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 386.

Muʿāwiyah's reply disturbed the cunning strategist who composed poems in his response reminding him of the dark horizon and the possibility of meeting the fate of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr.[1]

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ had guessed right, as having captured the river banks, the Imam (A) allowed the enemy access to water[2] and thus proved that he was committed to moral principles in his encounter with his most bitter of enemies and that he, unlike Muʿāwiyah, did not believe that ends justify means.

After Freeing the Banks of the Euphrates

Both armies were positioned at a safe distance from each other, awaiting further orders. However, the Imam (A) was reluctant to fight the battle and strove frequently to find a solution to the issue by dispatching emissaries and messengers.[3]

It was in the last days of the month of Rabīʿ al-Thānī 36 / October 656 that the Imam (A) was visited unannounced by ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, the murderer of the innocent Hurmuzān, a Persian who had converted to Islam such that his faith had been recognised by the second caliph who had granted him some means of sustenance.[4] When ʿUmar was assassinated by the dagger of a man by the name of Abū Lu'lu' and the officials' attempts at apprehending the assassin proved futile,[5] ʿUbayd Allāh, a son of the caliph, contrary to that which is humane, killed Hurmuzān in retaliation.[6] The Imam's (A) attempts at having ʿUbayd Allāh punished by the then caliph (i.e. ʿUthmān) proved futile and the Imam (A) swore by God at that time that if he had the power he would punish him to the full extent of the divine law.[1] When ʿUthmān was assassinated and the Imam (A) was selected as the caliph, ʿUbayd Allāh feared the Imam's (A) punishment and departed Medina for Syria.[2]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 186.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 145; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 242; *Tajārib al-Salaf*, p. 47.

[3] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 387; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 242.

[4] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 469.

[5] Historians are not unanimous as to the fate Abū Lu'lu' following his assassination of ʿUmar. It is reported that he was apprehended and executed (*Tārīkh-i Guzīdih*, p. 184; *Tārīkh-i Fakhrī*, p. 131). According to al-Masʿūdī (*Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 329) he committed suicide by the same dagger. However, the author of *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* (vol. 1, part 4, p. 489) reports that according to Shiʿi reports, he fled Medina, hastened towards Iraq, and finally died in Kāshān.

[6] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 161; *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 583; *Tajārib al-Salaf*, p. 23.

ʿUbayd Allāh thus visited the Imam (A) in the Battle of Ṣiffīn and said to him derisively, 'Glorified is God who made you seek vengeance for the blood of Hurmuzān and made me seek vengeance for the blood of ʿUthmān.' The Imam (A) said, 'God will make us meet in the battlefield.'[3] It was in the heat of the battle that ʿUbayd Allāh was slain by the Imam's (A) soldiers.[4]

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[1] Addressing ʿUbayd Allāh, the Imam (A) said, 'O transgressor! By God! If I have power over you one day in this world I shall behead you.' *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 5, p. 24; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 3, p. 61; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 395.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 388.

[3] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, Cairo, p. 169; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 186.

[4] It is reported by al-Masʿūdī (*Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 395) that ʿUbayd Allāh was killed by the Imam (A) who struck such a heavy blow on him that his iron armour was split asunder and the Imam's (A) sword cut his intestines.

16

Issuing the Last Ultimatums

Dispatching Three Emissaries to Muʿāwiyah

It was in the last days of the month of Rabīʿ al-Thānī 36 / October 656 that the Imam (A) summoned three Muslim dignitaries, the first from the Helpers, the second from the Hamdān tribe, and the third from the Tamīm tribe. He asked them to visit Muʿāwiyah and call him to obedience to divine command to join the Muslim *ummah*. The man from Tamīm said to the Imam (A), 'Do you see it fit and appropriate that if he is willing to swear allegiance you will grant him some privilege (like governorship)?' The Imam (A) who under no circumstances violated moral principles said to them, 'Now depart to meet and reason with him and ask for his opinion.'

Their conversation with him may be summarised as the following:

> The man from the Helpers said, 'Your life in this world will come to an end, you will go to the next abode, and your deeds will be divinely judged. By God! Do not cause discord in the *ummah* and refrain from shedding blood.'
>
> Muʿāwiyah thus interrupted him, 'Why do you not advise your chief with such wise counsel?'
>
> The man replied, 'Glorified is God! My lord is not like you. He excels all people in morality, religious belief, precedence in Islam, and family relationship with the Prophet.'
>
> Muʿāwiyah asked him, 'What is it that you are saying? What do you want?'

> He replied, 'I advise you to answer your cousin's call and such answer of yours will lead to the establishment of religion on a firm basis and also your good reputation.'
>
> Mu'āwiyah said, 'Then, taking vengeance for 'Uthmān's blood will be postponed. No! By the compassionate God, I will not do accordingly!'

The man from the tribe of Hamdān intended to speak, but the man from Tamīm took the lead by saying, 'Your goal was reflected in your reply to the man from the Helpers. Your intention is not concealed from us. You intend to deceive people and attract their sentiments by resorting to saying that their leader was innocently murdered and they are supposed to take vengeance for his blood. A group of ignorant people have thus answered your call, but we know that you delayed in assisting the murdered caliph and you were thus pleased with his being assassinated. Many people seek to attain to some rank but God impedes their dream from coming true. You seek to fulfil your wishes, but no intention of yours is good. If you fail to fulfil your wish, you will be in dire circumstances. You will not fulfil your wish until you deserve to be cast into the hellfire. Fear God and let go of what you have in your hand. Do not fight with those who deserve to rule.'

The reasoning of the Imam's (A) emissaries enraged Mu'āwiyah and contrary to his usual disposition of responding gently to his opponents, he provided them with a fierce reply which was indicative of his mental imbalance, 'You boorish and bullying Bedouin! Off with you! Only the sword arbitrates between you and I!'

The man from the tribe of Tamīm said, 'Are you threatening us by the sword? We will before long strike a blow to you.' They left and reported the outcome of their meeting to the Imam (A).[1]

The Assembly of the Qur'an Reciters from Iraq and Syria

Qur'an reciters (*qurrā'*) were held in such high esteem in the early days of Islam that their tendency towards any side would lead a multitude of Muslims to follow their course.

In such circumstances, when hope of reconciliation had been lost, the Qur'an reciters of Iraq and Syria, numbering thirty thousand, camped at a certain place and their representatives – like 'Ubaydah Salmānī, 'Alqamah ibn Qays, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Utbah, and 'Āmir ibn 'Abd al-Qays – frequently visited the commanders of both armies. They first met with Mu'āwiyah. Their conversation with him may be summarised as below.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 187–188; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 242; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 146.

The representatives asked, 'What is it that you want?'

He replied, 'I seek to take vengeance for 'Uthmān's blood.'

They inquired, 'From whom?'

He replied, 'From 'Alī.'

They asked, 'Did he murder 'Uthmān?'

He said, 'Yes, he did and granted refuge to 'Uthmān's murderers.'

The representatives came to the Imam (A) and said to him that Mu'āwiyah accuses him of murdering 'Uthmān. The Imam (A) said, 'By God! He is telling untruths. I did not take his life.'

They returned to Mu'āwiyah and related the Imam's (A) words to him. He said, 'He did not take 'Uthmān's life with his own hands, but he ordered his assassination and instigated people to murder him.' The Imam (A), having been informed of Mu'āwiyah's words, denied that he had any role in murdering the caliph. In response to the Imam's (A) denial of such charge, Mu'āwiyah resorted to some other claim, saying, 'If this is the case, he should surrender 'Uthmān's murderers to us or give us a free hand in arresting them.'

The Imam (A) replied, 'Since it was not premeditated, it cannot be punished by retaliation. The reason is that murderers used the Qur'an as an excuse to take his life. They provided their own interpretation of the Qur'an. There occurred some dispute between them and the caliph who was killed when he was in power.' That is, granted that the act was wrong, such act of murder would entail no retaliation.

When the Imam's (A) representatives notified Mu'āwiyah of the Imam's (A) legal reasoning (which forms a legal principle), he noticed that he was defeated in debate. Therefore, he resorted to another claim, saying, 'Why did 'Alī assume caliphate without prior consultation with us and the people residing here and deprived us of the office of caliphate?'

In response, the Imam (A) said, 'People follow the Migrants and the Helpers and they are the representatives of the Muslims who are dispersed in other regions. They willingly and sincerely swore allegiance to me and I would never allow the like of Muʿāwiyah to rule the Muslim *ummah*, to ride on their necks, or to break their walking sticks.'[1]

Muʿāwiyah asked, 'All the Migrants and the Helpers were not in Medina, but some of them lived in Syria. Why were they not consulted?'

The Imam (A) replied, 'The Imam is not supposed to be elected by all the Migrants and the Helpers scattered throughout the land, since such an election would not be possible. The Imam is supposed to be elected from among those who persevered steadfastly in the cause of Islam and who are counted among the Badriyyūn [i.e. those who took part in the Battle of Badr]. The fact is that they all swore allegiance to me.' Addressing the representatives of the Qur'an reciters, the Imam (A) said, 'Do not allow Muʿāwiyah to deceive you and cause the loss of your life and belief.'

It is to be noted that after the sad demise of the Prophet (S) and the expansion of Muslim territories, the Helpers and the Migrants were scattered in Muslim lands. Furthermore, means of mass communication did not exist at that time and it was impossible to ask for the views held by all of them and insisting on such consultation would only lead to disruption and disorganisation in governance. Therefore, only the majority of the Migrants and the Helpers residing in Medina could be consulted.

There was no point in exclusively attending to their views and had there been the possibility of holding a referendum, they were no different from other companions of the Prophet (S) who had met with him and who had believed in him yet who had not immigrated to other regions. Why should electing the caliph be vested with the companions only with other Muslims being excluded from expressing their views?

The Imam (A) believed that imamate, as with prophetic mission, was principally divine designation. Accordingly, when the Imam (A) spoke of electing an imam from among the Migrants, the Helpers, or those who took part in the Battle of Badr, he simply intended to employ a means of convincing others with their own line of reasoning.

From the perspective of electing a leader, we cannot speak of consulting the views of the Migrants, the Helpers, all the companions of the Prophet, or Muslims in general, since the means of communication, compared to modern-day means, were slow and it could take months for a messenger to reach his destination. Therefore, there was no other alternative but to be content with the allegiances sworn by distinguished Muslim personalities (i.e. the Badriyyūn referred to by the Imam).

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 189; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 16.

Skirmishes

As the representatives were engaged in exchanging messages in the months of Rabīʿ al-Thānī, Jumādā al-Awwal, and Jumādā al-Thānī (October–December), there occurred skirmishes (whose number is reported as eighty-five), but they did not lead to full battles or bloodshed, since the Iraqi and Syrian Qur'an reciters served as mediators between the opposing groups.[1]

Abū Umāmah and Abū al-Dardā'

These two erstwhile companions of the Prophet (S), intent on preventing bloodshed, visited Muʿāwiyah, saying, 'Why do you fight against ʿAlī?' He resorted to his old excuse, the response to which he had frequently heard from the Imam (A) and his companions. They related his words to the Imam (A). This time, the Imam (A) provided Muʿāwiyah with another response, in that he said to his supporters that Muʿāwiyah sought ʿUthmān's murderers. Of a sudden, more than twenty thousand men in armour appeared and all claimed that they had taken the life of the caliph.[2]

Having witnessed that scene, the two aged companions of the Prophet (S) left both groups in order not to see that scene any longer. Nonetheless, they were supposed to discern and support the truth.

The skirmishes ceased in the month of Rajab (January). The Qur'an reciters had camped between the ranks of the two armies. Since Muʿāwiyah had feared that the Qur'an reciters would join ʿAlī's (A) forces and aiming at disrupting the status quo of the Imam's (A) camps, he came up with a ruse which is unprecedented in the history of Muslim wars.

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 190; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 17–18.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 190; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 17–18.

Mu'āwiyah's Spreading Hearsay about Demolition of the Dam on the Euphrates

The circumstances of war were altered to the benefit of the Imam's (A) army as a result of his capture of the banks of the Euphrates. Further, the Imam's (A) decisive reasoning in the presence of the Qur'an reciters from Iraq and Syria attracted many Syrian Qur'an reciters towards him, even though some of them adopted a neutral stance. Fearing the widespread influence of the Imam (A), Mu'āwiyah devised a stratagem to alter the course of developments to his own benefit.

The Imam's (A) army had camped at the bottom of the sloping plain of Ṣiffīn and Mu'āwiyah's army had been stationed on higher ground. There was a dam over the Euphrates. A rumour was of a sudden spread in the Imam's (A) army that Mu'āwiyah intended to demolish the dam on the Euphrates and thereby flood the Imam's (A) camp.

Mu'āwiyah had an arrow quietly shot towards the Imam's (A) camp around which was tied a warning to this effect: 'From the benevolent servant of God: I hereby report that Mu'āwiyah is about to demolish the dam on the Euphrates to drown all of you. Hasten to make a decision and take some precaution.'

The message fell into the hands of a soldier from the Imam's (A) army and the contents were disclosed to the army, the majority of whom believed in the veracity of its contents. Mu'āwiyah simultaneously dispatched two hundred men with picks, spades, and large baskets, pretending that he was about to tear down the dam.

Aware of Mu'āwiyah's ruse, the Imam (A) said to his army chiefs that Mu'āwiyah was unable to demolish the dam, but he intended to cast fear in their hearts, drive them out of their positions, and recapture the banks of the Euphrates. The army chiefs said, 'It is not like that. He is quite serious. There are some men digging holes to flood our camp.'

The Imam (A) said, 'O people of Iraq! Do not oppose me.'

The chiefs said, 'By God! We depart, but if you wish you may stay.' They all left the camp and chose a higher place. The Imam (A) was the last person to leave that spot. His words were verified before long when Mū'āwiyah's army occupied the Imam's (A) camp like a thunderbolt and the Iraqi soldiers were left in perplexity.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 190–191.

Compensation for Opposition

The Imam (A) summoned and censured the chief who opposed him. Ash'ath ibn Qays asked for forgiveness and said that he would compensate for the setback. Supported by Mālik al-Ashtar he launched a fierce strike on Mu'āwiyah's army and made them retreat to a distance of eighteen kilometres away from the formerly occupied area in order to compensate, in some way or another, for the setback which had ensued from their opposition to the Imam (A). The circumstances were again altered to the Imam's (A) interest and the banks of the Euphrates once more fell into the hands of the Imam's (A) army.

Nonetheless, the Imam (A) exhibited his magnanimity and manliness by immediately dispatching a message to Mu'āwiyah to the effect that he would not retaliate for their misdeed and they were free to make use of the water. Addressing his army, he said, 'Our goal is higher than withholding them from the water supply.'[1]

Skirmishes continued to occur from the month of Rajab 36 / January 657 to Dhū al-Ḥijjah / June of the same year during which period both sides avoided bloodshed. The flames of war were ablaze once again in the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah / June when the Imam (A) dispatched to his commanders – such as al-Ashtar, Ḥujr ibn 'Adī, Shibth al-Tamīmī, Khālid al-Dawsī, Ziyād ibn Naḍr, Ziyād ibn Ja'far, Sa'īd al-Hamdānī, Ma'qil ibn Qays, and Qays ibn Sa'd – to the battlefield and served as the commander of their battalions.[2] Al-Ashtar outshone other commanders. Sometimes two battles were fought in one day and both sides incurred casualties. When the crescent of the month of Muḥarram 37 / July 657 appeared on the horizon, both sides agreed to cease the fight as a token of veneration for the month of Muḥarram in which waging war is forbidden. Finally, negotiations ushered in by dispatching emissaries.[3]

Events of 37 AH / 657–658 CE

The month of Muḥarram 37 / July 657 was a month of dispatching messengers and emissaries. The Imam (A) dispatched distinguished personalities – like 'Adī ibn Ḥātim,Shibth ibn Rib'ī, Yazīd ibn Qays, and

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 165.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 5, p. 243; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 146.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 195.

Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah – to Mu'āwiyah that they might convince him to desist from resuming battles. Their negotiations with Mu'āwiyah may be summarised as follows.

'Adī ibn Ḥātim said, 'We have come to call you to something whereby God grants our *ummah* solidarity and protects the blood of Muslims. We call you on behalf of the most righteous and the most beneficent Muslim. People assembled around him and God blessed them with guidance. No one, but you and your supporters, refrained from swearing allegiance to him. We call you to desist from such disobedience before you meet the fate of the Companions of the Camel.'[1]

Mu'āwiyah said, 'You are apparently here for threatening, rather than for reconciliation. Your wish is too far-fetched. I am Ḥarb's son and I never fear to strike empty waterskins.[2] By God! You are one of those who instigated people to murder 'Uthmān and you are one of his murderers. O 'Adī! I have seized that with my strong arms.'

Shibth ibn Rib'ī and Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah said, 'We have come here for making peace and (you are in a poetical mood) to employ the figures of speech? Let go of idle talk and say something which might be of some use to you and us.'

Yazīd ibn Qays said, 'We are here to convey messages and we never desist from providing advice, reasoning, and stating what may lead to solidarity and unity. You know our Imam and the Muslims are aware of his excellence. You are not unaware of such a matter. The righteous and those endowed with moral nobility never consider you on a par with 'Alī. Fear God and desist from opposing 'Alī. By God! We do not know anyone who may excel 'Alī in righteousness, God wariness, and being a model of morality.'

Mu'āwiyah said, 'You called us to two things: obedience to 'Alī and maintaining solidarity. We accept the latter, but we do not believe in obedience to him. Your leader has murdered our caliph, has sowed discord in the *ummah*, and has granted refuge to those who murdered the caliph. If he believes that he has not murdered the caliph we do not deny his claim, but could it be denied that those who murdered the caliph are his companions? If he sends them to us to be punished by us, we will answer to your obedience and solidarity.'[1]

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[1] That is, 'Ā'ishah, Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, and their supporters who fought against 'Alī (A) in the Battle of the Camel. [Translator]

[2] Arabs struck on empty waterskins to put camels to flight.

Analysis of Muʿāwiyah's Reply

Muʿāwiyah did not adopt a single stance in his arguments, but he altered his words according to circumstances. He emphasised at times that the Imam (A) was a murderer and he did not deny such claim at any cost. Notwithstanding his acknowledgement of the Imam's (A) innocence in murdering ʿUthmān, he insisted that the Imam (A) had to surrender to him the murderers of the caliph. The point is that he was not competent to make such claim, since he was neither an heir to the caliph nor did he rule the Muslims. By insisting on surrendering to him the murderers of the caliph, he solely sought to cause chaos in the Imam's (A) army. He was aware that the insurgents of Iraq, Egypt, and Hejaz were the murderers of the caliph, that is, they directly or indirectly had a hand in that act of murder by encouraging, suggesting, and expressing satisfaction. Those who had been weary of the tyranny of the caliph's officials insisted that the Imam (A) had to play an active role following ʿUthmān's assassination. Surrendering such large numbers of people was impossible and solely entailed the collapse of the government and further chaos and rebellion.

In these negotiations, Muʿāwiyah claimed that the central government was only supposed to surrender the murderers of the caliph, whereas he also claimed that a council of the Migrants and the Helpers residing in different regions needed to be consulted in matters of governance. Such contradictory statements are clearly indicative of Muʿāwiyah's opportunism and unscrupulousness.

Now, we resume the summary of Muʿāwiyah's negotiations with ʿAlī's (A) emissaries.

Shibth ibn Ribʿī said, 'O Muʿāwiyah! By God! Would you execute ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir if he were surrendered to you?' (ʿAmmār was the man about whom the Prophet said, 'He will slay the tyrants'.)

Muʿāwiyah said, 'By God! If ʿAlī surrenders to me the son of Sumayyah [i.e. ʿAmmār], I will slay him in the presence of Nā'il, ʿUthmān's slave.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 2–3; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 147; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 196–198; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 21–22.

Shibth said, 'By the Lord of the heavens. You are not following the path of justice. By God besides whom there is no god! You will not be able to take the life of Sumayyah's son unless people are beheaded and the land, despite its vast expanse, becomes too small for you.' (That is, he will have to endure hardship before he is able to take the life of 'Ammār).

Mu'āwiyah said, 'If the land becomes small for me, it will become smaller for you.'

That was the end of the negotiations of the Imam's (A) emissaries with Mu'āwiyah which proved futile in affecting the latter to adopt a different course. They were about to depart when Mu'āwiyah asked Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah, one of the emissaries, to stay. He thought that he could talk to him separately and exercise some influence on him, as each of the emissaries represented a large number of the Imam's (A) supporters.

Addressing Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah in private, Mu'āwiyah said, "Alī severed the ties of blood relationship by murdering our Imam and granting a safe haven to his murderers. If you and your tribe support us I promise to install you, following our victory, as the governor of one of the two cities (Kufa and Basra).'

Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah said, 'I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord[1] and I have been blessed by divine bounties. I shall never support the guilty.' It was an allusion to the words of the Prophet Moses (A).[2] Then, he left Mu'āwiyah's presence.

Mu'āwiyah, turning towards 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, the cunning strategist, said, 'Each of them provides us with a good answer. They are unanimous in heart and reasoning.'[3]

Mu'āwiyah's Emissaries Meeting with the Imam (A)

By dispatching emissaries the Imam (A) sought Mu'āwiyah's adopting a different course so that the issues could be solved through negotiations. In contrast, Mu'āwiyah sought to postpone the war and cause discord in the Imam's supporters as he was well aware that 'Alī (A) never changed his course in dealing with the likes of him.

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[1] An allusion to Qur'an 6:57. [Translator]

[2] An allusion to Qur'an 28:17. [Translator]

[3] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 3, p. 3; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 148; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 199; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 22.

Mu'āwiyah dispatched Ḥabīb, Shuraḥbīl, and Ma'n to meet with the Imam (A). They followed Mu'āwiyah's line of argument and served as his mouthpiece. A summary of their negotiations with the Imam (A) will follow.

Ḥabīb said, "Uthmān was upon divine guidance but you violated his right and murdered him. Now, surrender to us those who murdered him and we will take their lives. If you claim that you have not murdered him, retire from caliphate and leave it to a council. People will decide on the appointment of a caliph.'

His line of argument was weak and ungrounded. He accused the Imam (A) with murder without producing any evidence. He considered himself as the defendant of the caliph's right. Then, he acknowledged the Imam's denial of the accusation and demanded his resignation. It is as if all his arguments served as a prelude to his last statement. Accordingly, the Imam (A) firmly stood against him by saying, 'It is out of your league to intervene in matters of governance and demand our dismissal. Be silent as it is above your rank to intervene in such matters.'

Ḥabīb said, 'By God! You will find yourself in adverse circumstances.'

The Imam (A) said, 'Who are you? Go and collect your footmen and horsemen as you are too incompetent to do anything.'

Shuraḥbīl said, 'My words are exactly similar to Ḥabīb's. Do you have any other answer for me?'

The Imam (A) said, 'Yes, I do! I have another answer for you and your friend. God sent His prophet by whom He delivered people from error and He finally called him to Himself as he had accomplished his mission. Then, people recognised Abū Bakr as his successor and Abū Bakr also appointed 'Umar as his successor...Later, 'Uthmān assumed the caliphate and he was criticised and attacked by people for his deeds. Then, people turned to me when I was not involved in their affairs. They insisted on their swearing allegiance to me. I first declined, but they insisted that Muslims were unanimous as to my caliphate and they feared discord and chaos if they could not swear allegiance to me. As a result, I accepted their allegiance.

'Ṭalḥah and Zubayr did likewise but they later violated their allegiance to me. Then, Mu'āwiyah rose in opposition to me. He lacks any precedence in faith or religion. He is a freed man and son of a freed man.

He is from the Umayyads and he and his father were the enemies of the Prophet and unwillingly converted to Islam. It is a source of surprise for us that you provide him with support and that you follow him at the price of turning away from the Prophet's family. You turn to others when there is the household of the Messenger of God. I call you to the Book of God, the prophetic tradition, turning away from falsehood, and reviving the signs of religion. I say this and I ask divine forgiveness for myself and for all believing men and women.'[1]

Had Shuraḥbīl (the man from Tamīm who feigned righteousness) not been entangled by worldly desires and had he been slightly acquainted with the history of Islam, he would have welcomed the Imam's (A) words. However, having failed to stand against the Imam's reasoning, he resorted to sophistry and said, 'What do you think about 'Uthmān's assassination? Do you bear witness that he was innocently martyred?' Such question was beyond the obligations of an emissary and he solely aimed to cause chaos in that meeting. Issuing a judgement as to that claim required a thorough investigation of the causes leading to 'Uthmān's assassination. As a result, the Imam (A) did not acknowledge his claim, which was used by the emissaries as an excuse to end the meeting with him by saying, 'He who does not testify to his innocence will be disliked by us.'

They caused the Imam (A) to recall these blessed verses of the holy Qur'an: '*Indeed, you cannot make the dead hear, nor can you make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs* [*upon you*], *nor can you lead the blind out of their error. You can make only those hear who believe in Our signs and who have submitted*' (27:80–81).

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 4; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 148–149; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 200–202; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 23–24.

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Determining the Fate of the Battle of Ṣiffīn

The Imam (A) was a model of fortitude and steadfastness. He exhibited the utmost degree of flexibility in dealing with the opposition posed to him by the son of Abū Sufyān, Mu'āwiyah. Nevertheless, Mu'āwiyah was so overcome by his thirst for power that he was not only unaffected by the messages of envoys and their wise counsel but he became more obstinate. Finally, the Imam (A) decided to determine the fate of the battle in order to save his valuable time and cut that tumour from the body of the Muslim society.

One of the Islamic principles in confronting the enemy is that any non-aggression treaty concluded between the Islamic state and any other party is to be honoured unless the Muslim ruler finds some evidence that the other party intends to violate the treaty and commit an act of treachery. In such situation, he takes some pre-emptive measure by declaring the treaty null and void and thereby declares war. This is reflected in this blessed verse of the holy Qur'an: '*And if you fear treachery from a people, break off* [*the treaty*] *with them in a like manner. Indeed, God does not like the treacherous*' (8:58).

This principle indicates that Islam honours the administration of justice and upholding moral principles whereby the enemy may not be attacked unannounced, even though the signs of treachery be manifest in the words and dealings of the enemy.

Although the Imam (A) had not concluded any treaty of this nature with Mu'āwiyah, it was out of respect for the months during which waging war was impermissible that Ṣiffīn rested in peace for a while. Nonetheless, in order to remind the Syrians that the peace would be in effect following the month of Muḥarram, the Imam (A) dispatched Marthad ibn Ḥārith to stand before the Syrian army at the sunset of the last day of Muḥarram and announce in a loud voice, 'O people of Syria! The Commander of the Faithful (A) is saying that he granted you respite and postponed the war that you may turn towards the truth. He provided you with evidence from the Book of God and called you to obey it, but you did not turn away from rebellion and failed to answer the call of truth. It is under such circumstances that I declare as invalid any bilateral peace treaties as God does not like the treacherous.'[1]

When the Imam's (A) message, announced by Marthad, reverberated in Mu'āwiyah's camp and caused a stir in the armies of both sides. Battalions were deployed in battle array and the commanders of each battalion were designated. The Imam (A) deployed his forces as follows.

'Ammār ibn Yāsir was designated the commander of the cavalry and 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl al-Khuzā'ī was appointed as the commander of the infantry. Hāshim ibn 'Utbah was vested with the standard of the entire army. Then, the Imam (A) organised the army into right and left flanks and a central brigade. The Yemenis were assigned to the right flank. Different clans of the tribe of Rabī'ah were deployed in the left flank. The courageous warriors of the tribe of Muḍar, the majority of whom were from Kufa and Basra, were positioned in the central brigade. Each of these was divided into cavalry and infantry. Ash'ath ibn Qays and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās were designated as the commanders of cavalry of the right and left flanks. Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad and Ḥārith ibn Murrah were appointed as the commanders of the infantry of the two flanks. The standard of the tribes was vested with the respective chiefs. Ibn Muzāḥim, in *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, makes mention of twenty-six standards, each of which belonged to a tribe, but it is for the sake of brevity that the names of the standard-bearers and their tribes will not be mentioned here.[2]

Mu'āwiyah also deployed his forces and designated commanders and standard-bearers. It was at daybreak that the armies were prepared for fateful battle. The Imam (A) stood among his forces and said in a loud voice, 'Do not launch any early strike, since, by the grace of God, you have manifest proof in fighting this battle and leaving them until they launch the attack will serve as another manifest proof for you. When you defeat them, do not slay those who turn their backs to you in flight. Do not slay the wounded. Do not expose the naked bodies of the enemy. Do not mutilate those who fall in the battle. Do not commit any act of disgrace when you reach their camps. Do not enter anyone's home without my permission. Do not seize any property from the enemy other than what you find in the battlefield. Do not provoke women by harming them, even though they slander you, your chiefs, and the righteous, since they are physically and mentally weak. When they were polytheists we were ordered that they be left alone and when a man, in the age of ignorance [i.e. pre-Islamic times], struck a woman with a staff or an iron rod he was disgraced and he was censured by his children.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 5; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 149; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 202–203; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 25; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, summarised and with minor changes.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 205; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, pp. 24–26.

The Commander of the Faithful (A) recommended his forces at the battles of Jamal, Ṣiffīn, and Nahrawān to observe the following precepts. 'O servants of God! Fear disobedience to God. Cast down your eyes. Lower your voice. Do not indulge in talking. Prepare yourselves for confronting and fighting the enemy and defending yourselves by all your means. Be steadfast and exercise perseverance. Remember God in order to find salvation. Turn away from discord and contention that you neither incline towards weakness nor do you lose your dignity and glory. Exercise fortitude that God supports the forbearing.'

Having completed his speech, the Imam (A), accompanied by eleven battalions, stood before the enemy. The forces in the Imam's (A) army were so deployed that members of a tribe, some of whom lived in Iraq and some others inhabited Syria, faced one another in the battleground.

The battle dragged on in the first days and some atmosphere of peace, moderation, and hope prevailed on both sides. Battalions fought until midday and then desisted from fighting. Later, the battle intensified and engagement began in the morning and they fought until nightfall and at times fighting dragged along well into night time.

Deployment of Military Forces

It was on the first day of the month of Ṣafar / August that the Imam's (A) army, led by Mālik al-Ashtar, and the Syrian army, led by Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah, waged battle for a part of the day and some warriors from both groups lost their lives. Then, they kept a distance from each other and returned to their camps.[1]

It was on the second day that some battalions of the cavalry and the infantry from the Imam's army, led by Hāshim ibn 'Utbah, and the some battalions of the Syrian army, led by Abū al-A'war al-Sulamī, confronted each other.[2]

A fierce battle broke out on the third day when 'Ammār ibn Yāsir led the Imam's (A) army and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ was the commander of Mu'āwiyah's forces.[3] 'Ammār stood before the Syrian army and said in a loud voice, 'Do you want to know the person who bore animosity against God and the Prophet and the one who has wronged Muslims and supported polytheists? When God willed to make His religion manifest and support His prophet, that person, out of fear rather than heart-felt willingness, pretended to be a Muslim. It was after the sad demise of the Prophet that he turned into an enemy of the Muslims and a friend of the guilty. O people! Behold that that person is Mu'āwiyah. Curse him and rise in battle against him. He is the one who intends to wipe out the divine splendour and render support to the enemies of God.'

A man said to 'Ammār that the noble Prophet (S) had been reported as saying, 'Fight people until they convert to Islam and it will be following their conversion to Islam that their blood and property will be protected.' 'Ammār acknowledged the report and added, 'The Umayyads did not [sincerely] convert to Islam since the early days of Islam but they pretended to be Muslims and concealed their disbelief until the time that they found supporters for their disbelief.'[4]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 214–215; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 30; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, pp. 387–388.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 214–215; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 30; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, pp. 387–388.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 214–215; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 30; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, pp. 387–388.

[4] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 215–216; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 31; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 7.

Having said that, 'Ammār ordered the commander of the cavalry to attack the cavalry of the Syrian army, but the Syrians resisted the attack. Then, he ordered the commander of the infantry to launch a strike and the Imam's (A) army dispersed the enemy ranks and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ had to reposition his forces. The cunning strategist resorted to a stratagem which had been formerly used by 'Ammār, in that 'Ammār had declared the disbelief of the Umayyads and thereby had caused disturbance in the enemy lines. Similarly, 'Amr raised a spear from which hung a black piece of cloth, which was the standard formerly given to him by the Prophet (S). The troops, staring at the standard, began to talk. The Imam (A), aiming at preventing sedition, immediately enlightened his supporters by saying, 'Do you know the story of this standard? One day the Prophet (S) took out this standard and turning towards the Muslim forces asked, "Who will take it with what is in it?" 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ inquired, "What is in it?" The Prophet (S) said, "That he will neither fight a Muslim nor will he draw near to a disbeliever." 'Amr accepted the condition, but, by God, he became close to the polytheists and is now fighting Muslims!

'By God, who caused the sea to split and created man! They did not wholeheartedly convert to Islam but they simply pretended to be Muslims, concealed their disbelief, and returned to their animosity when they found supporters; they perform prayers to put up a false front.'[1]

It was on the fourth day that Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah led a battalion to the battleground. 'Ubayd Allāh led a Syrian battalion to the arena and a fierce war broke out between them.[2] 'Ubayd Allāh dispatched a message to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah calling him to fight hand to hand. When the Imam (A) was informed of the call, he hastened on horseback to his son and called him to stop. Then, he charged towards 'Ubayd Allāh and called him to a duel, but a cold shiver ran down the Syrian commander's spine and said, 'There is no need to fight you'. He charged out of the battleground and the two armies returned to their camps.[3]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 215–216; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 4, p. 31; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 7.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 388.

[3] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 7; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 150; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 221–222; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 388.

It was on the fifth day, which was a Sunday in the month of Ṣafar 38 / July 657, that an Iraqi battalion led by Ibn ʿAbbās and a Syrian battalion led by Walīd ibn ʿUtbah, confronted and a fierce battle broke out between them which lasted until midday, by which time they ceased fighting and returned to their camps. The Syrian army began to slander and called the children of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib by bad names. A slanderer was challenged by Ibn ʿAbbās, but he did not engage in a fight with him and left the arena.[1]

The Syrian army consisted of people unacquainted with the realities and history of Islam, else they would not have been under the command of someone who was explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an as ungodly (*fāsiq*). Walīd is mentioned in the Qur'anic verse: '*If an ungodly* [*person*] *should bring you some news, verify it*' (49:6).[2] This man is depicted in the Qur'an as: '*What? Is he who has been a believer like unto him who has been ungodly? They are not equal*' (32:18).[3]

It is true that some men fell in those battles and both sides returned to their camps with empty hands, but the speeches delivered by the Imam (A), ʿAmmār, and Ibn ʿAbbās enlightened people as to the realities and Muʿāwiyah's unfounded claim was more or less known to them. As a result, it was on the fifth day of the battle that Shimr ibn Abrahah, accompanied by a number of Syrian Qur'an reciters, joined the Imam's (A) army. Their escape into the light was indicative of the darkness into which the Syrian army had sunk. The rebel commander trembled with rage and feared the recurrence of the flight.

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said to Muʿāwiyah, 'Do you intend to fight the one who is a close relation of Muḥammad and has been steadfast in the cause of Islam? He is unrivalled in morality, spirituality, and acquaintance with the secrets of war. He is here to fight you along with the few companions of Muḥammad, the heroes, Qur'an reciters, and the noblest of people. They are held in high esteem by Muslims. You need to make the Syrians endure the worst hardships and hold out hopes to them before they feel restless by the prolongation of the battle. Bear in mind that what you are doing is wrong.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 7; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 150; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 221–222; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 388.

[2] Muslim Qur'an exegetes unanimously maintain that this blessed verse makes a reference to Walīd ibn ʿUtbah.

[3] For details on the occasion of the divine revelation of this verse, see hadith exegesis sources, e.g. *Durr al-Manthūr* and *Burhān*.

Mu'āwiyah learned from the cunning strategist that he could make the Syrians fight in the battle ground by his pretending to be religious, God fearing, and pious. Therefore, he had a pulpit installed and assembled the chiefs of the Syrian army. He ascended the pulpit and thus shed crocodile tears, 'O people! Let us take care of your lives. Do not be weakened. Do not desist from supporting us. It is a perilous day. It is the day of truth and safeguarding the truth. You are on the side of truth. You have the proof in your hands. You are fighting against the man who has violated allegiance, the one who shed the blood of an innocent man, the one who is not pardoned by anyone in the heavens.'

He was succeeded by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ on the pulpit who said similar words and then descended the pulpit.[1]

The Imam's (A) Speech

The Imam (A) was informed of Mu'āwiyah's resorting to deceit and feigning righteousness in order to call the Syrians to wage battle against him. He had all people assembled in a spot. The narrator is reported as saying, 'I saw the Imam reclining on his bow, encircled by the Prophet's companions. He intended to make it known to the people that the companions of the Prophet were with him. He began by the glorification of God and then said,

> O People! Hear my words and remember them. Egotism stems from disobedience and arrogance springs from haughtiness and conceit. Satan is an enemy who is always there to give you empty promises. Beware that Muslims are like brethren. Neither slander nor desist from rendering support.
>
> The religion is one and its paths are even. One who adopts it has joined it and one who turns away from it has deviated from it. One who turns away from it follows the path to perdition. One who is considered trusted but violates the trust, or makes a promise but fails to stand on his word, or tells untruth is not a Muslim. We are the household of compassion. Our words are true and our deeds are meritorious. The Seal of the Prophets

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 222; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 180.

> is one of us. Leadership of the Muslim community is vested in us. The reciters of the Book of God are from us. I call you to God, to the Prophet, to fighting with the enemies of God, steadfastness in the cause of God, obtaining divine satisfaction, performing the prayer, paying *zakāh*, pilgrimage to the House of God, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, and striving for payment from the treasury of the Islamic government to those deserving to benefit from it.
>
> It is a source of wonder that people are being encouraged by the Umayyad Muʿāwiyah and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ the Sahmī to be righteous! You are aware that I have never opposed the Prophet and I shielded him by my life when heroes trembled with fear. Glorified is God who granted me such a merit. The Messenger of God passed away in my arms. I was alone in washing his dead body which was turned from side to side by angels. By God! No nation has fallen into discord following the demise of their prophet unless the followers of falsehood prevailed over the followers of truth.[1]

ʿAmmār, the loyal companion of the Imam (A), thus addressed the people, 'The Imam enlightened you but the *ummah* failed to follow the right path neither in the beginning nor at the end.'

It may be inferred from Ibn Muzāḥim's report that the Imam (A) delivered his sermon in the eve of Monday 6 Ṣafar 38 / 14 July 657. Finally, he encouraged all his forces to attack the enemy and eradicate corruption. As a result, he prepared his forces the next day when he explained to them the method of waging battle in a sermon.[2]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 223–224; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 181–182.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 223–224; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 181–182.

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Outbreak of an All-Out Battle

Eight full days had elapsed from the start of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. Limited skirmishes in different places and various troop movements proved ineffective. The Imam (A) reflected on taking measures aimed at achieving his goals by incurring minimum loss. He was certain that limited strikes would entail but loss and fatality. As a result, he thus addressed his supporters in the moonlit night of 8 Ṣafar / 16 July. 'Glorified is God! That which He shattered will not stand on a firm basis and what He established on a firm basis will not be shattered. If He willed, even two individuals of this nation or other individuals would not have any difference, no human being would ever rise to fight another because of divine matters, and the qualities of the noble would not have been denied by those divested of such qualities.

'It is our destiny that we are confronting such group at this spot. We are all being seen by God and we are in His presence. If He wills He will before long send some punishment to deny the wrong doers and make manifest the truth. He has made this world the abode of deeds and the hereafter the abode of rewarding the beneficent and chastising the maleficent. Behold that by divine will you will confront the enemy tomorrow. Therefore, perform more prayer, read the Qur'an more, and invoke God to grant you steadfastness and victory. Confront them tomorrow perseveringly and cautiously and be righteous in your deeds.' The Imam (A) completed his sermon and left the assembly and his forces went to prepare their weapons.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 225; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 182; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 7–8; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 150.

The Imam (A) had a man stand before the Syrians on Wednesday 8 Ṣafar / 16 July to declare the Iraqi preparedness to battle with them.

Similarly, Muʿāwiyah organised his army by dividing them into divisions. The forces from Ḥimṣ (Ḥumṣ), Jordan, and Qinnasrīn[1] constituted different divisions of his army. His bodyguards were Syrians commanded by Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī who encircled him in order to ward off enemy penetration into the central brigade.

Dissatisfied with the Syrian military array, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ intended to assist Muʿāwiyah. Reminding him of the agreement between the two (that in case they gained victory ʿAmr would be installed as the governor of Egypt), ʿAmr said, 'Grant me the commandership of the divisions of the forces from Ḥimṣ and dismiss Abū al-Aʿwar from this position.' Gladdened by that suggestion, Muʿāwiyah immediately dispatched a message to the commander of the forces from Ḥimṣ saying, 'As ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ excels us in military experience, I appoint him as the commander of the cavalry and you need to join some other division.'

Aspiring to gain the governorship of Egypt, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ summoned his sons, ʿAbd Allāh and Muḥammad,[2] provided the army with a new array, and ordered that forces in armour should serve as the vanguard and that unarmoured forces be positioned at the rear. He then had his two sons move between the lines and examine their organisation. However, he still felt that he had to do likewise. Similar to Muʿāwiyah, ʿAmr ascended a pulpit in the central brigade that was guarded by the forces from Yemen. He ordered that anyone intending to approach the pulpit should be killed immediately.[3]

When the motive behind fighting is power and control, one needs to install bodyguards. Nonetheless, when the motive behind fighting is spiritual, one is not afraid of losing one's life in his cause. As a result, the Imam (A) had no bodyguards, but he issued commands riding a black horse to his forces, roared like a lion, inspired fear in the hearts of Syrian heroes, and lopped off their heads with his sharp sword.

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[1] That is, the historical town of Chalcis-on-Belus, near Aleppo, Syria. [Translator]

[2] It was mentioned above that they feigned piety and advised their father to keep away from supporting Abū Sufyān's son [Muʿāwiyah], but now they turned into his most intimate supporters! It is reminiscent of the old saying: 'What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh'.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 226; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 182.

Differences in leadership stem from different motives. Seeking martyrdom is the result of believing in the hereafter and certainty in one's true claim; whereas fear of death and sacrificing others at the price of self-preservation are the consequences of mundane attachments and denial of metaphysical realities. It is a source of wonder that 'Amr confessed to such reality, saying, as to the Imam's (A) army, 'They have come to the field with a heavenly goal and do not fear martyrdom.' 'Amr's support for Mu'āwiyah was not out of interest in him and his victory, but he pursued his own interests which could be safeguarded by Mu'āwiyah's victory. As a result, he reminded Mu'āwiyah of the immense value of the suggestions and counsels with which he provided the latter. The following conversation is indicative of his aspirations.

Mu'āwiyah said, 'Finish completing the battle array as soon as possible.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said, 'Provided that I gain the governorship.'

Mu'āwiyah, fearing that having dealt with the Imam, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ will turn into a rival, immediately asked, 'Which governorship? Do you intend anything other than the governorship of Egypt?'

The veteran strategist and godless dealer put up a righteous front, saying, 'How may Egypt serve as a compensation for paradise? How may slaying 'Alī be the price for being cast into the ever blazing hellfire?'

Anxious that 'Amr's words become widespread in the army, Mu'āwiyah was quite insistent on urging him to keep his voice down. Aspiring to be installed the governor of Egypt 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ thus addressed the Syrians, 'Syrian forces! Organise your lines and lend God your heads. Invoke God for assistance and fight the enemies of God and your own enemies. Slay them so that God slays and destroys them.'[1]

As mentioned above, the Imam (A) asked for a horse and a black horse was brought to him. The horse was so strong and restless that it was pulled by its bridle. The Imam (A) held its rein and recited these verses of the holy Qur'an: '*Glory be to Him, who has subjected this to us, and we ourselves were not equal to it. Surely unto our Lord we are turning*' (43:13–14). Then, he lifted his hands in supplication, saying, 'O God! Steps are taken towards You, as the bodies suffer hardships, the hearts turn [towards You], the hands are lifted upwards, and the eyes open...O God!

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 237; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 189–190.

We turn towards You in our grief for the absence of our prophet, the large number of enemies, and diversity of our demands. O God! Judge between us and those people as You are the Best Judge.'[1]

It was finally on Wednesday 8 Ṣafar / 16 July that an all-out attack occurred, with fighting continuing from dawn to nightfall when the two armies returned empty-handed to their camps. The next day the Imam (A) performed his pre-dawn supererogatory prayer and dawn prayers and then, accompanied by his supporters, launched a strike.[2] His pre-dawn supererogatory prayer included the following passage, 'O Lord! If you grant us victory over our enemy, keep us from wrongdoing and make firm our steps in the cause of truth. If they gain victory over us, grant us martyrdom and keep my surviving supporters from trial [i.e. affliction].'

The Fiery Speeches Delivered by the Commanders of the Imam's (A) Army

The speeches delivered by the commanders and other figures of each army were of significance in the dissemination of teachings and values. A speech could urge an army to launch a strike so valiantly and thereby prepare the path to victory. Those who gave speeches besides the Imam (A) included 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl,[3] Sa'īd ibn Qays[4] (at Nāṣirīn), and Mālik al-Ashtar,[5] each of whom made use of his own line of reasoning to encourage the Imam's (A) army to attack the Syrian enemy. Some of events that occurred at that time will be mentioned below.

1. Who will Hold this Qur'an in his Hand?

Before launching the attack, 'Alī (A), intent on issuing an ultimatum, asked his forces, 'Who will hold this Qur'an in hand and call the Syrians to obeying it?' A young man by the name of Sa'īd rose up and said that he was prepared to do likewise. The Imam (A) repeated his question once again and heard the same answer from that young man who said, 'I am prepared to do so, Commander of the Faithful!' 'Alī (A) provided him with a copy of the Qur'an and the latter held it in his hand, took steps towards Mu'āwiyah's army, called them to the Book of God and acting upon it, but he was slain before long by the enemy.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 230–231; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 176.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 8; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 151.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 234; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 186.

[4] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 347; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 188.

[5] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 239–241; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 190–191.

2. A Battle Fought by Two Ḥujrs

Ḥujr ibn 'Adī al-Kindī had answered the Prophet's call by converting to Islam at his hands. He later became a devoted supporter of 'Alī (A) and fought on the side of the Imam. He finally lost his life, along with a number of the Imam's sincere supporters, at the hands of Mu'āwiyah's men in Marj al-'Adhrā' (situated at a distance of approximately twenty kilometres from Syria). Reference is made to him in historical sources as Ḥujr al-Khayr (the good Ḥujr), in contrast to his paternal uncle, Ḥujr ibn Yazīd, referred to by the nickname Ḥujr al-Sharr (the vicious Ḥujr).

Notwithstanding their close family ties, these two Ḥujrs confronted each other. Ḥujr al-Sharr challenged his nephew. As the two men were fighting with their spears, Khuzaymah, a man from Mu'āwiyah's army rushed to assist Ḥujr ibn Yazīd by targeting Ḥujr ibn 'Adī with his spear. Khuzaymah was at that time slain by a number of Ḥujr ibn 'Adī's companions, but Ḥujr ibn Yazīd immediately fled the arena.[2]

3. 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl's Attack on the Left Flank of the Syrian Army

'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl al-Khuzā'ī was a distinguished commander in the Imam's (A) army. An esteemed companion of the Prophet (S), he was a model of self-restraint, bravery, and heroism. He commanded the right flank. The left flank was under the commandership of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās. 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, Qays ibn Sa'd, and 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl were encircled by the Qur'an reciters from Iraq.[3]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 244; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 196.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 243; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 195–196.

[3] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 151.

Before launching the attack, ʿAbd Allāh thus addressed his men, 'Muʿāwiyah has undeservedly laid claim to the caliphate and has risen in opposition to the rightful caliph. He has resorted to false arguments to fight the truth. He has attacked the Bedouin and different groups and has displayed that their error is becoming in their eyes.' He went on to say, 'By God! You are in the light of your Lord and a manifest proof. Fight the treacherous lowly people. Do not be afraid of them. How could you fear them when you have in your hands the Book of God which is manifest and accepted? You fought them along with the Prophet. By God! They are neither purer nor more righteous than before. Arise and proceed to fight the enemy of God and your own enemy.'[1]

Commanding the right flank, ʿAbd Allāh was in armour and held two swords (one in each hand). In his first strike he defeated Muʿāwiyah's army as well as that of Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah, the commander of the left flank of the Syrian army. He strove with all his might to reach Muʿāwiyah's tent and slay that most vicious man, but he encountered the resistance of Muʿāwiyah's guards who had encompassed him in the form of five concentric circles. He managed to pass through those circles that collapsed one after the other. He endeavoured brilliantly to reach Muʿāwiyah's tent, but he lost his life before he could reach it.[2]

Compared to Ibn Muzāḥim's *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī provides a clearer depiction of the events. Al-Ṭabarī's report reads as follows. ʿAbd Allāh was fighting the left flank of the enemy army and Mālik al-Ashtar was carrying out a strike against the right flank. Wearing his armour, Mālik held a Yemeni metal plate; when he brought it down it seemed as if water was flowing from it; when he lifted it the glare dazzled the eyes. He decimated the right flank of the enemy and finally made his way to the spot where ʿAbd Allāh ibn Budayl, accompanied by less than three hundred[3] Qur'an reciters, had reached. He noticed that ʿAbd Allāh's forces seemed like corpses stuck to the ground.

Mālik warded off the enemy from them. Glad to see al-Ashtar, they inquired about the Imam (A) and thanked God when they heard that he was fighting in the left flank of his army. ʿAbd Allāh insisted on proceeding with his few surviving forces, slaying Mu'āwiyah's guards, and finding the vicious man. However, al-Ashtar asked him to stay where he was and defend himself.[1] In spite of al-Ashtar's message, 'Abd Allāh thought that he could shatter the circles of the guards with a lightening strike and lay his hands on Mu'āwiyah. Wielding a sword in each hand he launched a strike with his forces and slew each enemy troop with one strike. He proceeded so far that Mu'āwiyah had to reposition.[2]

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 9; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 151 (with minor variations); *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 234.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 248.

[3] The number is recorded as one hundred by Ibn Muzāḥim in *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*.

In his fight with the guards, 'Abd Allāh amazingly said in a loud voice, 'There are people seeking revenge for 'Uthmān's blood.' By 'Uthmān he meant a brother who had lost his life in that battle, but the enemy was amazed that 'Abd Allāh was calling people to seek revenge for 'Uthmān's blood!

Finally, Mu'āwiyah seriously feared for his life and requested the assistance of Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah, the commander of the right flank of his army. Ḥabīb's efforts proved futile in repelling 'Abd Allāh's advance who was at a short distance from Mu'āwiyah's tent. Mu'āwiyah thought that he had no alternative but to order the guards to pelt him with rocks. Such a tactic proved successful as he was fatally wounded.[3] Exulting over having saved his skin, Mu'āwiyah saw 'Abd Allāh's dead body in person. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir, a kinsman of Mu'āwiyah, spread his turban on 'Abd Allāh's face and asked divine mercy for him. Mu'āwiyah insisted on baring his face, but his kinsman declined, since he used to be a friend of the deceased.

Mu'āwiyah promised to refrain from mutilating the dead body, and thus succeeded in taking a glance at the brave commander's face. When he saw his face, he said, 'By God! He is the chief of his people. O God! Make me gain victory over the other two heroes, al-Ashtar al-Nakha'ī and Ash'ath al-Kindī.'[4] In depicting 'Abd Allāh's unrivalled heroism and bravery he recited some verses of 'Adī ibn Ḥātim, the opening lines of which include:

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[1] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 153.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 196; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 151–152; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 10.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 245–246.

[4] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 197; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 153–154; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 13–16; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 246; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 398.

The warrior is the one that when the battle bares its
teeth to him he will do likewise.
If it rolls up its sleeves he will do likewise.[1]

The Battle Continued until the Night of Clamour[2]

A full-scale battle out between the Imam's (A) followers and those of Mu'āwiyah from the beginning of the month of Ṣafar 38 / the beginning of the second week of July 657 and continued until midday of the thirteenth/ twenty-first of that month.[3] That night is termed by chroniclers as the Night of Clamour (*laylat al-harīr*). In Arabic which 'clamour' translates is *harīr* which denotes a dog's howl, since Mu'āwiyah's army howled like dogs under the strikes of the Imam's (A) forces.

The Umayyad rule was in serious jeopardy until 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ suddenly halted the fateful and bloody battle by contriving a ploy and causing discord in the Imam's (A) army. This ploy ultimately ushered in the arbitration on Friday 17/25 of the month and a truce.

The events of Ṣiffīn are sequentially reported by chroniclers until tenth/eighteenth day of the month,[4] but the sequence is lost thereafter and the historian needs to make use of his historical ability to recreate the sequence of events. Such sequence lasting until the midday before the Night of Clamour will be recreated below.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 197; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 153–154; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 13–16; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 246; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 398.

[2] The Night of Clamour is the name of a violent conflict that occurred in Ṣafar 37 / July 658, between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah after a week of combat; see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol., p. 383b. [Translator]

[3] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 31, where the date of concluding the peace treaty is recorded as 13 Ṣafar / 21 July and that of the Night of Clamour as Friday (p. 24). However, since the beginning of the month of Ṣafar was a Wednesday, the Night of Clamour should have been the night before 17 Ṣafar / 17 July (the night before the third Friday of the month). Now, if the second night before Friday is intended, the Night of Clamour should have been 10 Ṣafar / 18 July, rather than 13 Ṣafar / 21 July, unless one says that there had been three days of debate between the midday before the Night of Clamour and concluding the peace treaty that took place three days later. Nonetheless, it is reported by Ibn Muzāḥim in *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn* that the battle continued after 10 Ṣafar / 18 July.

[4] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, pp. 387–390.

The Events of the Tenth Day

The sun rose on 10 Ṣafar / 18 July to split asunder the horizon and brighten the plain of Ṣiffīn which had turned into an abyss of blood. The Imam (A) was encircled by the tribe of Rabīʿah who sought martyrdom and loved the Imam. A commander from that tribe rose up, saying, 'Who is there to pledge allegiance to death and to sell his life for the sake of God?' Seven thousand men rose up to swear allegiance to their commander. They swore to charge into Muʿāwiyah's tent and never look behind.

They were so eager in their allegiance that one of them arose, saying, 'You shall not be pardoned by the Arabs if one of you survives but ʿAlī (A) is hurt.' When Muʿāwiyah was informed of the bravery and heroism of the tribe of Rabīʿah he could not help but to admire them and compose the following lines:

When you say that the tribe of Rabīʿah turned their back to the battle ground,

You will of a sudden see that multitudes of them wage battle like mountains.[1]

Reorganisation of the Right Flank

In contrast to Rabīʿah's feats of manliness, the tribe of Muḍar failed to exhibit such devotion. The right flank of the Imam's (A) army was defeated when their commander, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Budayl, fell in battle and the forces from the tribe of Muḍar fled the battleground. As a consequence, the troops from the right flank joined the central brigade that was commanded by the Imam (A) who tried to reorganise the right flank by installing Sahl ibn Ḥanīf as its commander, but the Syrian army, commanded by Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah, flooded on to the Imam's (A) right flank divesting the new commander of the opportunity to improve the situation.

Informed of the unfaithfulness of the Muḍar forces positioned in the right flank, the Imam (A) immediately summoned Mālik and ordered him to say to that group that had lost the Islamic discipline, 'Why do you flee from the death that you cannot endure but it will lead to intransient life?' In imparting the Imam's (A) message, Mālik stood before the defeated right flank and gave a fiery speech, in which he said, 'Fleeing from the battlefield will entail indignity, loss of access to public funds, humility in life and death, disgrace in this world and the world to come, and incurring divine wrath and excruciating chastisement. Clench your teeth tightly and charge towards the enemy with raised heads.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 241–242; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 306.

Mālik reorganised the right flank and launched an attack on the left flank of Mu'āwiyah's army and made that division retreat to Mu'āwiyah's central brigade.[1] The Imam (A), satisfied with the reorganisation of the right flank, said, 'Now, exercise fortitude since God granted you stability and peace of mind and your steps became divinely firm by certitude. The defeated people [those lacking faithfulness in the battleground] should know that they incur divine wrath and affliction. Fleeing from battle will lead to divine wrath and humility.'[2]

You slay people and mourn for them!

Ma'rib is a city situated on the northeast of Sana'a. It is well known for its colossal dam which was devastated between 542 and 570. Yemeni tribes made use of this dam to achieve an advanced civilisation and agriculture. The Yemeni tribes, following the devastation of the dam by the flood known as 'Arim,[3] were scattered in other regions of Arabia and mainly in Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq. Notwithstanding such dispersal, they firmly held to their descent from their tribes. As a result, we notice that clans of the tribes of Azd, Muḍar, Kindah, Quḍā'ah, and Rabī'ah inhabited Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine.

In the organisation of his army the Imam (A) made the members of each tribe inhabiting Iraq confront other members of the same tribe inhabiting other regions, since such juxtaposition could lead to compassion and thus ward off violent bloodshed.[4]

A chief of the tribe of Khath'am of Syria by the name of 'Abd Allāh once requested to visit a chief of the same tribe inhabiting Iraq and the two met after a while. The Syrian suggested that the two clans of the tribe of Khathʿam had better desist from shedding blood and wait for a while to support the triumphant side of the battle. Nevertheless, the negotiations proved futile since the Iraqi chief declined the suggestion as he was not in favour of turning his back to the Imam (A). Consequently, a man-to-man confrontation broke out between the members of the two clans.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 197–198; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 12; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 250.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 14.

[3] See Qur'an 34:16. [Translator]

[4] *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, vol. 5, pp. 34–35.

The Iraqi Wahb ibn Masʿūd al-Khathʿamī took the life of his Syrian counterpart; in retaliation, a Syrian Khathʿamī attacked and killed Abū Kaʿb, the chief of the Iraqi Khathʿamīs. Having taken the life of Abū Kaʿb, he burst into tears for the murdered chief, saying, 'I took your life for your obedience to Muʿāwiyah, whereas your relation to me was closer and I loved you more than them. By God! I do not know what to say, only that Satan has led us astray and the Quraysh have made us their plaything.' That man-to-man confrontation between the clans of a tribe left eighty men dead from both sides.[1]

History Repeats Itself

Such uncanny incident is not unprecedented; a number of such uncanny instances are to be found in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. Some examples are as follows:

1. The Iraqi Nuʿaym ibn Ṣuhayb al-Bajalī was killed. His cousin, Nuʿaym ibn Ḥārith al-Bajalī, who served in the Syrian army, insisted, before Muʿāwiyah, that his cousin's dead body should be covered. Muʿāwiyah did not grant his request under the excuse that ʿUthmān was buried at night time out of fear for that group. However, the Syrian Bajalī said, 'If you do not permit it I will join ʿAlī.' Finally, Muʿāwiyah allowed him to bury the dead body of his cousin.[2]
2. Two clans from the tribe of Azd confronted each other. One of the tribal chiefs said, 'It is a great affliction that two clans of the same tribe have confronted each other. By God! Our share from such war will be nothing but cutting off our hands and feet. If we fail to battle, we will not support our leader and our tribe. If we

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 204–205; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 257–258.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 207; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 154; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 14; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 259.

fight in this battle, we will cast our dignity to the wind and we will extinguish the fire of our lives.'[1]

3. A Syrian warrior stepped into the battleground, asking for a rival in a duel. An Iraqi took on the challenge and severe blows were exchanged between the two warriors. Ultimately, the Iraqi grabbed the neck of the Syrian, brought him to the ground, and sat on his chest. When he removed his helmet, he noticed that the Syrian was his full brother! He asked the Imam's (A) companions to inquire about it. The Imam ordered him to set his brother free. He did likewise, but the released brother joined Muʿāwiyah's army once again.[2]
4. A man from Muʿāwiyah's army by the name of Suwayd stepped into the battleground and asked for a rival in a duel. A warrior from the Imam's (A) army by the name of Qays entered the arena and accepted his challenge. They recognised each other at the first glace and each called the other to join his leader. The Iraqi warrior thus expressed the degree of his devotion to the Imam (A), 'By God who is One! I will attempt at striking this white tent [i.e. Muʿāwiyah's tent] with my sword to take the life of the one in possession of this tent.'[3]

Shimr ibn Dhī al-Jawshan, a Supporter of the Imam (A)

One of the never ending wonders of the world is that Shimr was a devoted supporter of the Imam (A) in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. A Syrian by the name of Adham inflicted a severe blow on Shimr's forehead and broke its bone in that battle. In retaliation he struck the Syrian with his sword, but the blow was far from being fatal. Shimr returned to his tent to rest. He drank water and returned to the battleground with a spear. He noticed that his Syrian rival was still awaiting him. He immediately targeted the Syrian with his spear so violently that the latter fell from his mount and had it not been for his Syrian comrades, Shimr would have taken his life. Shimr said, 'It was a retaliatory stroke.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 209; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 15; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 262.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 213; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 272.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 213; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 268.

Taking Pride in Martyrdom

Faithful individuals who believe in the hereafter and fight for holy causes take pride in martyrdom and their love for meeting God, a feature that is not found in other nations. Love for martyrdom is the most significant motive and the leading cause of rising against injustice and fighting in the cause of God. It is by this belief that a martyr changes this transient and insignificant life into an everlasting one and spares no effort to achieve such life.

A strong warrior from the tribe of Banū Asad who was attached to the Syrian army stepped into the battleground of Ṣiffīn and asked for a rival in a man-to-man duel. Iraqi soldiers stepped back from accepting the challenge, but, of a sudden, an old man by the name of Muqaṭṭaʿ al-ʿĀmirī rose up to confront the warrior from the Asad tribe. The Imam (A) prevented him from stepping into the battleground. The Asadī warrior still shouted at the top of his voice to announce his challenge. The martyrdom seeking old man arose each time, but the Imam (A) prevented him from encountering the strong warrior. Finally, the old man said, 'O Imam! Grant me leave to take on his challenge and lose my life in that fight and hasten towards paradise or take his life and rid you of this vicious man.'

The Imam (A) granted him permission this time and prayed for him. The old man's courageous and enthusiastic attack cast fear into the heart of the Syrian warrior and put him to flight. He was followed by the old man to the Muʿāwiyah's tent, but as the old man could not lay his hands on him, he had to return to the battleground.

Years later, when Imam ʿAlī (A) was martyred and the people pledged allegiance to Muʿāwiyah, the latter inquired about Muqaṭṭaʿ al-ʿĀmirī and summoned him. Muqaṭṭaʿ, who was sickly and advanced in years, visited Muʿāwiyah. Muʿāwiyah said, 'O brother! Had you not entered in such state, I would have never spared you unharmed.'

> The old man replied, 'By God! I ask you to take my life, deliver me from such miserable life, and thereby make me visit God before long.'
>
> Muʿāwiyah said, 'I will never take your life as I will need you.'
>
> He inquired, 'What do you want from me?'
>
> Muʿāwiyah said, 'I need to become your brother.'

The old man said, 'I parted with you for the sake of God and I remain in such state until God raises us from the dead on the Day of Resurrection and judges us on our deeds.'

Mu'āwiyah suggested, 'Give me your daughter's hand in marriage.'

The old man, 'I declined the easier request, let alone this one.' Mu'āwiyah asked him to accept some gift, but he said that he was not in need of his gift.[1]

A Military Tactic

It was on the last day, or thereafter, that the Iraqi and Syrian cavalry engaged in a fierce battle and one thousand troops of the Imam's (A) army were beset by the Syrians and the Iraqis were pressed on all sides. The Imam (A) said in a loud voice, 'Is there somebody to gain divine satisfaction and exchange his worldly life for the life in the hereafter?'

A man fully cladin armour by the name of 'Abd al-'Azīz, who was riding his black horse, said to the Imam (A), 'I shall obey your order whatever your command may be.'

The Imam (A) prayed for him and said, 'Attack the Syrian army and make your way to our men who are pressed on all sides by the enemy. When you reach them, say that the Commander of the Faithful sends you his greetings and bids you to say "God is Greatest" and we will attack on both sides, you from that side and we from this side, in order to break the encirclement and thus we will succeed in setting you free.'

The man launched a manly strike on the Syrian army, made his way to the encircled forces of the Imam (A), and conveyed his message to them. Gladdened by hearing the message they said 'God is Greatest' and heard the Imam's (A) army doing likewise. They managed to break the encirclement and join the Imam's (A) army. Eight hundred Syrians lost their lives and the blaze of the battle died down for a while.[2]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 223–224; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 278.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 243; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 308.

Growth of Political Initiatives in the Heat of the Battle

Military experts, since the time that ʿAlī's (A) army launched the first attack, predicated that victory would fall into the Imam's (A) hands, since they saw that the developments of the battle changed in the Imam's interest and Muʿāwiyah's army was subject to devastation and ruin. Some of the factors leading to such victory will be mentioned below.

1. The wise leadership and exquisite military commandership of Imam ʿAlī (A). It was because of such military leadership that the casualties of Muʿāwiyah's army were nearly twofold that of the Imam's (mention will be made below of the number of casualties and fatalities of the Battle of Ṣiffīn at the close of recounting the events of that battle).
2. The Imam's (A) courage was unrivalled. One of his enemies said that he shed the blood of any warrior who dared to confront him. His feats of bravery warded off the risks posed by distinguished warriors, cast fear into the hearts of the enemy, and they were mainly put to flight by him.
3. The Imam's (A) unwavering belief in righteousness, God-wariness, and his right to serve as the caliph and Imam. Those who believed in divine designation (*tanṣīṣ*) as the qualification for leadership, and also those who maintained that the qualification for caliphate lay in selecting the Migrants and the Helpers, assembled under the Imam's (A) flag aiming at siding with the truth and fighting falsehood as well as fighting of the just against the disobedient. Muʿāwiyah's forces were different in such respects, in that some of them adhered to Muʿāwiyah's cause for taking vengeance for the wronged caliph, but the majority of them pursued their worldly desires and mundane aspirations. There were still other people who had joined Muʿāwiyah because of their long lasting animosity against the Imam (A), something which is crystal clear to any historiographer.
4. Distinguished and respectable figures were in the Imam's (A) army, those who had fought beside the Prophet (S) in the battles of Badr, Uḥud, and Ḥunayn and their integrity and sincerity were acknowledged by the Prophet (S). Such figures as ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Qays ibn Saʿd, Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī, and ʿAbd

Allāh ibn Budayl caused doubt to be cast into the hearts of the simple-minded yet sincere men in Muʿāwiyah's army.

These factors, among others, led Muʿāwiyah and the master of his operations, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, to think that their defeat would be decisive. To prevent their defeat they resorted to furtive measures aimed at derailing the military victory of the Imam's (A) army. Such measures included communicating with the commander of ʿAlī's army to attract them and cause discord in the Imam's army.

1. The forces from the tribe of Rabīʿah were most loyal to the Imam (A) in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. They, unlike the wavering tribe of Muḍar, were steadfast in their cause. When the Imam (A) saw their flags he inquired about them and was told that they belonged to the forces of the Rabīʿah. He said, 'These are the flags of God. May God protect them and grant them steadfastness and forbearance.'[1]

   When the Imam (A) was informed of the messages exchanged between Muʿāwiyah and a chief of that tribe by the name of Khālid ibn Muʿammar, he immediately summoned Khālid and other distinguished figures of the tribe of Rabīʿah and said to them, 'O tribe of Rabīʿah! You have supported me and have answered my call. It is reported that one of your companions exchanged messages with Muʿāwiyah.' Addressing Khālid, he said, 'If the report is true, I will forgive you and grant you amnesty, provided that you depart for and settle in Iraq, Hejaz, or any other region where Muʿāwiyah does not hold sway. If the report is unfounded, fill our sad hearts with your delightful denial of the report.' He swore by God that the report was unfounded and his companions said that if the report were true they would take his life. A man from the tribe of Rabīʿah by the name of Ziyād ibn Ḥafṣah suggested that the Imam had Khālid pledge that he would not betray him.[2]

   There is evidence to believe that Khālid was in Muʿāwiyah's fifth column in the Imam's (A) army. When the Imam's army gained victory and in the moments that they were about to seize Muʿāwiyah in his own tent, Khālid ordered his forces to retreat and then later justified his command. An instance of his betrayal will be mentioned below.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 225–226; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 18–19.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 225–226; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 18–19.

The Imam's (A) left flank consisted of men from the tribe of Rabīʿah who were under the command of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās. The Imam's (A) left flank confronted the right flank of the Syrian army that was under the command of two most influential Syrian commanders – Dhū al-Kalāʿ and ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar. The infantry and cavalry forces that consisted of men from the tribe of Ḥimyar and were under the command of Dhū al-Kalāʿ and ʿUbayd Allāh, launched a fierce attack on the Imam's (A) left flank but their attack proved unsuccessful.

It was in the second attack that ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar thus addressed the Syrians, 'These Iraqis have murdered ʿUthmān. If you defeat them you will take your vengeance on them and you will destroy ʿAlī.' The men from the tribe of Rabīʿah resisted most steadfastly and only weak men stepped back.

Astute men from the Imam's (A) army suggested that when Khālid noticed that some of his forces had retreated he did likewise in order to urge the steadfast men from the Imam's army to retreat. Nevertheless, when he noticed their steadfastness, he immediately turned towards them and justified his act, saying, 'I stepped back to send those who had fled towards you.'[1]

According to Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, Muslim historians, like al-Kalbī and al-Wāqidī, are unanimous that in the second attack he intentionally ordered his men to retreat in order to defeat the Imam's left flank, since Muʿāwiyah had promised him that if he gained victory over the Imam's army he would be installed as the governor of Khurāsān to his last days.[2]

It is reported by Ibn Muzāḥim that Muʿāwiyah had sent a message to Khālid to the effect that if he gained victory in that battle, he would be installed as the governor of Khurāsān. Muʿāwiyah caused Khālid to fall prey to temptation yet he did not achieve his goal, since when Muʿāwiyah assumed the reins of power and appointed Khālid as the governor of Khurāsān, Khālid perished en route.[3]

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 19; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 156.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 228.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 306.

The Syrian army held ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar in high esteem, saying, 'The pure one, the pure child is with us!' Iraqis took pride in having Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr and had nicknamed him Ṭayyib ibn al-Ṭayyib (the Pure One, Son of the Pure One).

Ultimately, the fierce confrontation between the Ḥamiyarīs of the Syrian army and the men from Rabīʿah serving in the Imam's (A) army left many casualties and fatalities. For instance, five hundred men from the Imam's (A) army, stepped in the battle ground in full armour to confront the same number of forces in full armour from Muʿāwiyah's army. A fierce confrontation occurred between these forces and none of them returned to their bases.

A pile of severed heads, termed Tall al-Jamāmim, emerged following the battle wherein Dhū al-Kalāʿ, the strongest supporter of Muʿāwiyah who had urged the Ḥimyarīs to defend his life, was killed by a man by the name of Khindif and Ḥimyarīs faced a serious chaos.[1]

2. It was in the fiercest moments of the battle that ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar made an attempt to cause discord by dispatching an emissary to meet with Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (A). The Imam's (A) son, as permitted by his father, accepted to have a meeting with the emissary who said to him, 'Your father has been shedding the blood of the Quraysh. Are you prepared to succeed him so that we declare you as the caliph of Muslims?' The Imam's (A) son decisively declined the offer and it was because of his knowledge due to the imamate that he informed ʿUbayd Allāh of his miserable fate, saying, 'I see that you will be killed today or tomorrow. Behold that Satan has made an elegant display of your vicious deeds in your eyes.' It is reported that he led a battalion of four thousand men in green to the battleground on that day or the day after and lost his life at the hands of Ḥānī ibn Khaṭṭāb from the tribe of Hamdān.[2]
3. Muʿāwiyah summoned an eloquent brother of his by the name of ʿUtbah ibn Abī Sufyān and asked him to meet with Ashʿath ibn Qays and call him to peace and reconciliation. He went to the Imam's (A) army and called Ibn Qays in a loud voice. When Ashʿath was informed that a man from Muʿāwiyah's army intended

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 5, 233; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 297; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 179.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 5, 233; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 297.

to meet with him he asked for his name. When he was informed that 'Utbah ibn Abī Sufyān was there to visit him, he said, 'He is a young man seeking pleasures of life. He must be visited.' In his meeting with Ash'ath, 'Utbah said to him, 'Had Mu'āwiyah intended to meet with anybody other than 'Alī he would have a meeting with you, since you are the chief of peoples from Iraq and Yemen. You were 'Uthmān's son-in-law and his governor. You must not compare yourself with other commanders of 'Alī's army, since al-Ashtar killed 'Uthmān. 'Adī ibn Ḥātim instigated people to kill 'Uthmān. Sa'īd ibn Qays is the man whose blood money is promised to be paid by 'Alī. Shurayḥ and Zaḥr ibn Qays only pursue their concupiscent desires. You defended the Iraqis to exhibit your gratitude and you fought the Syrians out of prejudice. By God! You see what has become of our ties. I do not expect you to part with 'Alī and support Mu'āwiyah, but we suggest that it will be in our and your interest if you stay where you are.'

It is reflected in historical sources that Ash'ath had clandestine dealings with Mu'āwiyah and was waiting for some opportunity to alter the course of the battle in Mu'āwiyah's interest. In his answer he first praised the Imam (A) and denied 'Utbah's words one by one, but at the end he implied that he was in favour of putting an end to the war. He said, 'Similar to us, you also deserve to survive. I will reflect on this issue and will God willingly declare my opinion.'

'Utbah returned to Mu'āwiyah and notified him of the developments. Mu'āwiyah gladly said, 'He has said that he is in favour of peace.'[1]

4. Mu'āwiyah said to 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, 'Ibn 'Abbās stands only second to 'Alī in terms of distinction. 'Alī will not disagree with him. Devise some stratagem before this battle leads us to perdition. We will never reach Iraq unless all Syrians perish.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said, 'Ibn 'Abbās cannot be outfoxed. If he could be deceived, 'Alī could be deceived too.' Mu'āwiyah insisted that 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ wrote a letter to Ibn 'Abbās and close it with a poem.

When he showed his letter and poem to Mu'āwiyah, the latter said, 'Your prose is not as subtle as your verse!'

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 408.

In his letter and poem the cunning old strategist had praised ʿAbbās and his household, criticised Mālik, and had finally promised Ibn ʿAbbās that if the war came to an end, he would be on the council that would appoint the ruler.

Upon the receipt of the letter, Ibn ʿAbbās showed it to the Imam (A) who said, 'May God take the life of the son of ʿĀṣ! What an appealing letter! Write the reply and ask your brother, Faḍl, who is a capable poet to compose some verses.'

In his reply Ibn ʿAbbās wrote, 'Your shamelessness is unparalleled among Arabs. You sold your faith at a meagre price. Similar to sinners, you hold this mundane life in high esteem and hypocritically make a display of your piety. If you pursue divine satisfaction, do not aspire to be installed as the governor of Egypt and return home...ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah are not to be compared; similarly, Iraqis and Syrians are not alike. I seek divine satisfaction and you are after gaining the governorship of Egypt.' He added the verses of his brother, Faḍl, which had been composed as a response to ʿAmr's verses and showed the letter to the Imam (A) who said, 'If he happens to be a wise man he will not respond to your letter.'

Having received the letter, ʿAmr showed it to Muʿāwiyah, saying, 'You asked me to write the letter, but it proved fruitless to you and me.'

Muʿāwiyah said, 'Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAlī are of the same mind. They are the descendants of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.'[1]

5. When Muʿāwiyah noticed that the Imam's (A) forces were taking further initiatives, the encirclement was closing in, and the Syrian base would before long collapse, he made up his mind to write a letter to Ibn ʿAbbās to remind him that that the battle was due to Banū Hāshim's animosity against the Umayyads and warned him of its adverse consequences. In his letter, he tried to entice him by saying, 'If people pledge allegiance to you, we will do likewise.'

Upon receipt of the letter, Ibn ʿAbbās wrote a decisive and well-reasoned response such that Muʿāwiyah regretted writing to him, saying, 'This is the consequence of my doing. I will not write to him another letter this year.'[2]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 410–414 (with minor changes and omission of the verses of both letters); *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 98–99.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 414–416; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 100.

ʿAmmār and the Disobedient Group

Yāsir descended from an honourable Muslim family who had answered the Prophet's (S) call in the early days of Islam and had suffered excruciating tortures because of their faith. Yāsir and his wife, Sumayyah, finally lost their lives in the cause of their monotheistic beliefs under the tortures of Abū Jahl and his like-minded peers. The life of their young son, ʿAmmār, was spared by the intercession of the young people of Mecca and his outward dislike of the new religion. His outward dislike of the faith is allowed in this blessed Qurʾanic verse: '*...excepting him who has been compelled, and his heart is still at rest in his belief*' (16:106).

Informed of ʿAmmār's denial of the Prophet (S), he said, 'No, never. ʿAmmār is full of faith and monotheism is in his flesh and blood.' It was at that time that ʿAmmār arrived with tears rolling down his cheeks. The Prophet (S) wiped away his tears, saying that he was supposed to express his denial in such circumstances.[1] As reported by Qur'an exegetes, he is referred to in two other Qur'anic verses as well.[2]

He joined the Prophet (S) following the latter's migration to Medina and fought in the cause of Islam in all the battles led by the Prophet[3] and also fought in some other battles led by the Prophet's companions.[4] He was not satisfied with the policies adopted by the then caliph, but it was for the interest of the Islamic faith that he cooperated with the caliphate.

The first step taken by the Prophet (S) following his immigration to Medina was the construction of a mosque. ʿAmmār excelled others in carrying out hard manual labour. Some people took advantage out of his sincere belief in, and commitment to, the Islamic faith by compelling him to carry out tasks which lay beyond his capacity. Once he complained to the Prophet (S), saying that they would cause his death. The Prophet (S) replied with most significant words: 'You will only lose your life at the hands of the tyrannical group, those deviating from the path of truth.

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī's commentary on the Qur'an, vol. 14, p. 122; *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 212, and other exegetical sources.

[2] Namely, '*Or is he who is obedient in the watches of the night, bowing himself and standing, he being afraid of the world to come...*' (39:9) and '*And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord at morning and evening...*' (6:52). See *Kashshāf*; Rāzī; *Durr al-Manthūr.*

[3] *Ghazawāt*, singular form: *ghazwah.* [Translator]

[4] *Sarāyā*, singular form: *sariyah.* [Translator]

Your last means of sustenance in this world will be a sip of milk.' This reply was welcomed by the audience.[1]

The Prophet's words spread among his companions and all people were informed of them. 'Ammār was from that day held in high esteem by Muslims and the Prophet (S) praised him on several occasions. The news of 'Ammār's taking part in the Battle of Ṣiffīn horrified the deceived forces of Mu'āwiyah's army and there were people who tried to verify the news.

'Ammār's Speech

Intent on stepping into the battlefield, 'Ammār rose up from among the Imam's (A) companions, saying, 'Servants of God! Fight those who seek vengeance for the blood of one who wronged himself, issued commands contrary to the Book of God, and was killed by a group of righteous people who forbade disobedience and enjoined the good. However, those whose mundane world was jeopardised by his murder voiced their protest, inquiring about his murder. When we responded that he lost his life for his misdeeds, they said that he had done nothing wrong!

> Aye, they believe that 'Uthmān did nothing wrong. He provided them with dinars on which they fed and grazed. They are not seeking vengeance for his blood, but they have tasted worldly pleasures which they love, but they know that if we lay our hands on them they will be deprived of those pursuits of pleasure.
>
> The Umayyads did not precede others in embracing the Islamic faith to deserve leadership. They deceived people and moaned "Our innocent Imam was murdered" in order to establish their tyrannical rule over people. This is their ruse through which they have assumed the reins. Had they not employed such ruse, they could not have found even two persons to pledge allegiance to them and render them support.[2]

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[1] This hadith, one of the Prophet's predictions, or news from the unseen, is reported by traditionists and historians. Its uninterrupted chain of transmission is emphasised in Suyūṭī's *Khaṣā'iṣ* and its various chains of transmission are incorporated in 'Allāmah Amīnī's *Ghadīr* (vol. 9, pp. 21–22). See also al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 21; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 157.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 157; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 319; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 21.

Having finished his speech, 'Ammār, followed by his supporters, proceeded towards the battlefield. When he saw 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ' tent, he shouted, 'You exchanged your faith for governorship of Egypt. Woe unto you. This is not the first time that you dealt a blow to Islam.' When he saw 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Umar's camp, he shouted, 'May God take your life. You exchanged your faith for the mundane gains granted by the enemy of God and Islam.'

In response, 'Ubayd Allāh said, 'No, I seek vengeance for the blood of the innocent martyr.'

'Ammār said, 'Liar! By God! I know that you never seek divine satisfaction. If you do not get killed today you will die tomorrow. Behold your intention knowing that God Almighty rewards and chastises His servant by their intentions.'[1]

Encircled by 'Alī's (A) supporters, he said, 'O God! You know that if Your satisfaction lies in plunging into the sea, I shall do likewise. If I see that your satisfaction lies in that I bend on the blade of my sword such that it sticks out of my back, I shall do likewise. O God! I know by Your grace that nothing satisfies you more than fighting against this group. Had I known that I should do anything else, I would have done it.'[2]

Reactions to 'Ammār's Presence in the Imam's (A) Army

Syrians were acquainted with 'Ammār's character and revolutionary background. The Prophet's (S) saying about him was widely known. However, few Syrians knew that he was in the Imam's (A) army. When the possibility of his participation spread in 'Alī's (A) army, those affected by Mu'āwiyah's venomous propaganda made an attempt to verify the news. They included Dhū al-Kalā', the Yemeni figure who played quite a significant role in mobilising the tribes of Ḥimyar in favour of Mu'āwiyah.

His heart was enlightened by divine light and he was in quest for the truth. He made up his mind to contact Abū Nūḥ, a Ḥimyarī tribal chief who resided in Kufa and had fought in the Imam's (A) army. Dhū al-Kalā' thus made his way to the vanguard of Mu'āwiyah's army and said in a loud voice, 'I am here to talk to the Ḥimyarī Abū Nūḥ from the clan of Kalā'.' Abū Nūḥ stepped forward and inquired about his identity.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 336; *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, Beirut, vol. 1, p. 496.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 21; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 157; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 320.

Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'I am Dhū al-Kalāʿ. I call you to come to us.'

Abū Nūḥ said, 'I seek refuge in God from approaching you on my own, unless my men accompany me.'

Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'You are protected by God, His messenger, and Dhū al-Kalāʿ. I would like to talk to you about something. Come alone and I do likewise and we will converse between these two lines.' They did likewise.

Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'I called you to talk to you about a hadith which I heard from 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ' (during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb). Abū Nūḥ asked about that hadith and Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'The Messenger of God, as reported by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, said, "The Syrians and the Iraqis will confront one another. The truth and the guide will be on one side and 'Ammār will be on that side."'

Abū Nūḥ said, 'By God! 'Ammār is with us.'

Dhū al-Kalāʿ asked, 'Is he wholeheartedly intent on fighting against us?'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'Yes. By the God of Kaʿbah! He is more eager than me in fighting against you. I wish that you were all one person and I would behead you all and I would begin with you, even though you are my cousin.'

Dhū al-Kalāʿ asked, 'Why do you wish that when I have not severed the ties of kinship and I consider you as a close relation? I do not wish to take your life.'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'It is in the light of Islam that God severed a series of ties and reunited some individuals. You and your supporters have severed your spiritual ties with us. We are on the right path but you follow falsehood, as you support the chiefs of disbelief and the confederates.'

Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'Are you prepared to accompany me to the lines of the Syrian army? I grant you safe passage such that you will neither lose your life, nor will you lose your possessions, nor will you be obliged to pledge allegiance, but you simply need to notify 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ that 'Ammār is in 'Alī's army and God may bring peace between the two armies.'

Abū Nūḥ said, 'I fear you and the ploys of your companions'.

Dhū al-Kalāʿ said, 'I stand on my word.'

Looking up at the heavens Abū Nūḥ said, 'O God! You know Dhū al-Kalā' promised me safety. You are aware of what I entertain in my heart. Protect me.' Then, he accompanied Dhū al-Kalā' to Mu'āwiyah's army. Approaching the headquarters of Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ he noticed that they were both instigating people to fight.

Dhū al-Kalā' said to 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, 'Would you like to converse with a wise and truthful man about 'Ammār ibn Yāsir?'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ inquired about the identity of the man; Dhū al-Kalā' pointed to Abū Nūḥ, saying, 'He is my cousin from Kufa.'

Turning towards Abū Nūḥ, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said, 'I see reflections of Abū Turāb ['Alī] in your face.'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'Muḥammad (S) and his companions are reflected in my face but in your face Abū Jahl and the Pharaoh are to be seen.'

Abū al-A'war, a commander in Mu'āwiyah's army drew his sword, saying, 'I should take the life of this liar with signs of Abū Turāb who has marched into our camp bold as brass to slander us.'

Dhū al-Kalā' said, 'By God! If you raise your sword on him, I will shatter your nose with my sword. This man is my cousin and has entered this camp upon my promise of safety. I have brought him here to inform you about 'Ammār about whom you have been frequently inquiring.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked, 'Swear by God that you are telling the truth. Is 'Ammār ibn Yāsir with you?'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'I cannot provide you with an answer unless you tell me the reason why you make such inquiry when there are companions of the Prophet with us who are all intent on fighting against you.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said, 'I heard from the Prophet that 'Ammār would be slain by a tyrannical group and that 'Ammār would not part with truth and he would be unscathed by the hellfire.'

Abū Nūḥ said, 'By God besides whom there is no god! He is with us, prepared to fight against you.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked, 'Is he?'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'Yes. By God besides whom there is no god! He said to me in the Battle of Jamal that we would gain victory over the people of the camel (*aṣḥab al-jamal*) and he told me today, "If the Syrians launch an attack on us and drive us to al-Hajar, we will not cease to fight since we know that we are truthful in our claim that they follow falsehood and those of us who fall in battle will be admitted to paradise but those of them who lose their lives in battle will be cast into hell."'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked, 'Could you arrange some meeting between me and 'Ammār?'

Abū Nūḥ replied, 'I do not know, but I will do my best.'

He thus departed to meet with 'Ammār in the midst of the Imam's (A) army and informed him of all the developments, adding that a group of twelve men, including 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ were interested in meeting with him.

'Ammār said that he was prepared for the meeting. A group consisting of the cavalry moved to the farthest spot of the Imam's (A) army and 'Awf ibn Bishr, one of 'Ammār's men, went to the Syrian camp and looked for 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ. 'Awf showed to him 'Ammār's whereabouts. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked for 'Ammār's departure for Syria and 'Awf said that he would not be secure from their ruses and ploys. Finally, they came up with the idea that 'Amr and 'Ammār, protected by their men, meet in the middle of the two lines.

Both groups cautiously proceeded towards the meeting point and they held their scabbards in their hands as they dismounted. In meeting 'Ammār, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ pronounced in a loud voice, 'There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God' as a token of his belief in Islam.

Undeceived by his ruse, 'Ammār shouted, 'Silent! You turned your back to it in the lifetime of the Prophet (S) and thereafter and now you are pronouncing the declaration of faith?'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ shamelessly said, "Ammār, we are not here to discuss this issue. I found you the sincerest man in this army and would like to inquire about the reason for your confrontation with us, whereas we believe in the same God and book and perform our prayer in the same direction (*qibla*).'

Following a brief conversation, 'Ammār said, 'The Prophet (S) said to me that I would fight the unfaithful and those deviating from the path of truth. I fought against the unfaithful and you are the ones who deviate from the path of truth. However, I do not know whether I encounter those who secede from the faith.'

Turning towards 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, he said, 'O infertile man! You know that the Prophet, referring to 'Alī, said, "One who recognises me as his *mawlā* (guardian) will recognise 'Alī as his *mawlā*. O God! Be a friend of those who regard him as a friend and be an enemy to those who consider him an enemy."' Having completed their negotiations following a discussion on the assassination of 'Uthmān, both delegates returned to their own camps.[1]

This meeting tells us that 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ did not intend to know whether 'Ammār was in the Imam's (A) army because he knew the commanders of 'Alī's (A) army. It was in that line that he did not acknowledge 'Ammār's reasoning but made an attempt to have him confess that he had a hand in the caliph's assassination whereby he could instigate ignorant Syrians into revolt. Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ were undoubtedly lucky that Dhū al-Kalā' was killed before 'Ammār, since had Dhū al-Kalā' survived 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ would have failed in deceiving him by his unfounded claims and he could have even caused serious problems for Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ.

It was after Dū al-Kalā''s death and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir's martyrdom that 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said to Mu'āwiyah, 'I do not know whose death is a source of rejoicing to me. By God! Had Dhū al-Kalā' survived 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, he would have succeeded in urging all Syrians to return to 'Alī.'[2]

The Imam's (A) Feats of Bravery in the Battle of Ṣiffīn

As the overall in command of his army, the Imam (A) was unlike Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ who stayed in tents in the most secure points guarded by heroes and taking flight in perilous situations. The Imam (A) carried out his role by visiting different divisions of his army. He spearheaded the attacks on the enemy and it was due to his military and physical prowess that he came out triumphantly from heavy attacks.

Some instances of his feats of bravery will be mentioned below. Further details of such accounts are to be found in historical sources like Ibn Muzāḥim's *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn* and al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, pp. 16–22; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 332–336.

[2] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 157.

1. The Imam (A) in the Rain of Arrows

The Imam's (A) right flank fell into disarray when its commander, 'Abd Allāh ibn Budayl, fell in the battle. Ḥabīb ibn Muslamah was dispatched by Mu'āwiyah to crush the surviving troops of the right flank. Sahl ibn Ḥanīf was sent by the Imam to organise that flank of the Imam's army, but such measure proved futile and perplexed battalions of the right flank joined the central brigade that was commanded by the Imam.

The bravery of the tribe of Rabī'ah and the timidity of the tribe of Muḍar are attested in historical sources. It was in such circumstances that the Imam (A) stepped into the field. Zayd ibn Wahb, the chronicler of the Battle of Ṣiffīn, reports, 'I saw the Imam (A) in the rain of arrows passing between his neck and shoulders. The Imam's (A) children feared that he would be shot with arrows and it was again the Imam's wish that they tried to shield him. The Imam, however, still penetrated the enemy lines. The Imam's slave, Kaysān, then confronted Abū Sufyān's slave, Aḥmar, and the former was slain by the latter.

'Aḥmar, overcome by his victory, charged towards the Imam (A) with his sword, but the Imam grabbed him by his armour, pulled him towards himself, lifted him, and threw him onto the ground so fiercely that the slave's shoulders and arms shattered. Ḥusayn (A) and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, the Imam's sons, took his life and returned to their father. Turning towards Ḥasan (A), the Imam inquired, "Why did you not collaborate with your brothers in taking Aḥmar's life?" He replied, "They were able to take his life, Commander of the Faithful."'

It is reported by Zayd ibn Wahb that the closer the Imam (A) approached the Syrian army the more he charged against them. Fearing that Mu'āwiyah's army would overcome the Imam and put his life into jeopardy, Ḥasan (A) said to the Imam, 'There would be no harm in stopping and waiting for your steadfast and self-sacrificing followers from the tribe of Rabī'ah.' The Imam (A) thus replied to his son, 'There is some specific day for your father from which he does not turn away. It will neither be postponed by stopping nor will it be hastened by approaching the enemy. Your father neither fears facing death nor is he afraid of the approaching of death.'[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 248–250; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 198–200; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, pp. 10–11; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 151–152.

Abū Isḥāq is reported as saying, 'The Imam (A) carried a javelin in his hand in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He touched a commander of his army, Sa'īd ibn Qays, with the javelin. The commander asked the Imam, "Do you not fear to be so close to the enemy and be killed by them?" The Imam (A) replied, "Everyone is divinely protected by guards who preserve him from being cast into a well, dying under a collapsing wall, or being afflicted by some other harm. Nonetheless, when it is divine decree they forsake him and he will be shot by the arrow of destiny."'[1]

2. Slaying Ḥurayth, Mu'āwiyah's Slave

Ḥurayth, Mu'āwiyah's slave, was the greatest warrior in the Syrian army. He wore Mu'āwiyah's garments at times in battles and he was mistaken by some people for his master. Mu'āwiyah once said to him, 'Avoid fighting 'Alī, but target whoever you like with your spear.'

He related Mu'āwiyah's words to 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and the latter (for whatever intention) rejected his master's claim, saying, 'If you were from Quraysh, Mu'āwiyah would like you to slay 'Alī, but he does not want any non-Qurayshī to gain such honour. So, if you find the opportunity, attack 'Alī.'

The Imam (A) was leading his cavalry in the battlefield when, influenced by 'Amr's words, Ḥurayth challenged the Imam by boasting his prowess in combat. The Imam cut him into two halves with the first strike. Informed of his death, Mu'āwiyah sank into grief and composed lines in censuring 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ who had deceived him. His poem opens by these lines:

Ḥurayth (the defeated hero of mine)! Did you not know
that 'Alī gains victory over any hero?
Any hero who dare challenge 'Alī
was entangled in his hands and lost his life in them.

Slaying Ḥurayth stirred fear and fury in Mu'āwiyah's army. Another hero, 'Amr ibn Ḥaṣīn, stepped into the arena to take his revenge on the

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 250; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, p. 199.

Imam (A), but he was killed by a commander of the Imam's (A) army by the name of Sa'īd ibn Qays before he could confront the Imam.[1]

3. The Imam (A) challenges Mu'āwiyah to fight him

The Imam (A) entered the battlefield one day and stood between the lines of the two armies, intending to give Mu'āwiyah the final ultimatum. He called Mu'āwiyah by his name. Mu'āwiyah commanded his guards to inquire what the Imam wished to say. They asked the Imam, 'What is it that you want, son of Abū Ṭālib?'

The Imam (A) said, 'I wish to have a word with him.'

The guards communicated his message to Mu'āwiyah who, accompanied by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, went to the field and stood before the Imam (A). Ignoring 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, the Imam (A) said to Mu'āwiyah, 'Woe unto you. Why should these people kill each other for our sake? It would be better to have a man-to-man fight and the winner will assume the reins.'

Mu'āwiyah asked 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, 'What is your opinion.'

'Amr replied, 'Fair enough. If you turn away from fighting him, the utter disgrace which you will cause yourself and your household will not be wiped away so long as Arabs live in the world.'

Mu'āwiyah said to him, "Amr, I will not be outfoxed by the like of you. No hero has ever survived a battle with 'Alī.' Having said that the two men returned to their lines. The Imam (A) smiled and returned to his position. Addressing 'Amr, Mu'āwiyah said, 'What an idiot you are! I assume that you were not serious in your suggestion which was mingled with jesting.'[2]

Bravery of the Martyr's Son

Hāshim al-Mirqāl was a brave and competent commander of the Imam's (A) army and his brilliant career in Muslim conquests was well known. It was expected that his martyrdom would inflict a serious blow to the Imam's army, but the fiery speech delivered by his son changed the circumstances and made his followers more steadfast in treading his path. Holding his father's standard in hand,[1] he turned to those who were prepared to sacrifice their lives in the cause of truth, saying, 'Hāshim was a servant of God whose life was limited and his endeavours were recorded in the book of deeds. His life came to an end and God against whom no one may stand called him and he bade farewell to this world and met his Lord. He fought on the side of his cousin, the Prophet (S).

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 272–273; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 215–216; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 176.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 274–275; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 5, pp. 217–218; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, pp. 176–177; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 23; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 158 (with minor differences).

'He was one of the first people who embraced the Islamic faith. He was one of the most knowledgeable of people versed in the divine religion. He was one of the bitter opponents of the enemies of God, those who regard as lawful what God has made unlawful, those who rule people unjustly, those who have been overcome by Satan, those whose misdeeds have been made elegant in their eyes by Satan. It is incumbent on you to fight those who have turned away from the Prophet's path, those who have turned away from divine laws, those who have opposed his friends.

'Sacrifice your pure lives in this world in the cause of obedience to God that you may attain to the highest station in the hereafter...Even if there be neither divine reward and chastisement, nor paradise and hell, it will be better to fight on the side of 'Alī than on that of Mu'āwiyah, the son of the woman [Hind] who gouged out [Ḥamzah's] liver and bit into it. How may it not be as such when you entertain hope in your hearts.'[2]

Hāshim's son had barely finished his speech when Abū al-Ṭufayl, a companion of the Prophet (S) and a sincere follower of the Imam (A), composed an elegy for Hāshim, the opening lines of which are as the following:

O Hāshim, you have been granted the reward of being admitted to paradise,
You were slain in the cause of God by the enemy of the faith.[3]

A Fox in the Lion's Claws

Syrians were pressed in intense fighting and commanders had to step into the battlefield to alleviate the pains suffered by others aiming to leave no room for their opponents. Ḥārith ibn Naṣr was a bitter enemy of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ. They were like-minded but there was no love lost between them. In his poems Ḥārith criticised 'Amr for not taking part in the battle fought against 'Alī but urging others to enter the battleground. His poems were widespread in the Syrian army and left 'Amr with no other alternative but to confront, even once, the Imam (A) in the field.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 29; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 184; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 393.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 356; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 29.

[3] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 359.

That cunning strategist was also as cunning in the battlefield. In confronting him, the Imam (A) immediately threw him to the ground with a spear blow. Aware of the Imam's manliness, 'Amr bared his private parts and the Imam closed his eyes and turned away from him.[1]

The Confrontation of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ with Mālik

Mālik's feats of courage in the battlefield had rendered Mu'āwiyah sleepless. He thus ordered Marwān ibn Ḥakam to collaborate with some people to take the life of Mālik. However, Marwān did not assume the responsibility, saying, 'Your confidant is 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ whom you have promised to install as the governor of Egypt. It would be better to have him undertake this task. Your confidant is him not me. You have granted him favours but I have been denied such preferential treatment.'

Mu'āwiyah thus had to assign 'Amr and some others to fight Mālik, since the latter's military stratagems and his unequalled courage had dealt a severe blow to the Syrian army. Aware of Marwān's words, 'Amr had to take up the task, but he was no match for Mālik. In confronting Mālik al-Ashtar, a cold shiver ran down 'Amr's spine, but he feared the disgrace of running away from the field.

When both ranks were done with boasting their feats of courage, 'Amr withdrew from Mālik's charge, but the latter's spear grazed his face. Fearing for his life, 'Amr used the scratch as a pretext to put his one hand on his face and take the rein of his horse with the other hand. He thus fled to the Syrian army. His flight from the field made soldiers complain to Mu'āwiyah that he had made such a timid and incompetent man their commander.[2]

The Ascetic Young Man and the Worldly Old Man

Mālik thus addressed the Iraqis in a loud voice, 'Is there anyone among you to exchange his life for divine satisfaction?' A young man by the name of Athāl ibn Ḥijal stepped into the battlefield. Muʿāwiyah also sent an old man by the name of Ḥijal to confront that young man. As the two combatants targeted their spears at each other, they talked about their genealogy. It was known that they were father and son.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 423; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 313.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 440–441; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 79.

They dismounted their horses and embraced each other. The father said to the son, 'Dear son! Turn towards the world!'

The son said, 'Dear father! Turn towards the hereafter! You are supposed to make me turn away from worldly pursuits rather than joining the Syrians. What do you say about ʿAlī and righteous believers?' They finally decided to return to their former positions.[1] Family relation, rather than religious affiliation, proves feeble in a battle based on defending one's beliefs.

The Low Morale of the Syrian Army

Abrahah, a commander in the Muʿāwiyah's army, grieved over the increase in the number of the fatalities of the Syrian army and saw that Syrians had fallen victims of Muʿāwiyah's worldly pursuits and such a horrifying battle was waged by Muʿāwiyah to maintain his tyrannical rule. Addressing the Yemenis of Syria, he said in a loud voice, 'Woe unto you, people of Yemen! You seek your own perdition. Leave them ('Alī and Muʿāwiyah) to fight each other and we will follow the winner.'

Having heard Abrahah's words, the Imam (A) said, 'He is quite right. I had never heard such sensible words since my arrival in Syria.' Afraid of Abrahah's words, Muʿāwiyah went to the farthest rank of his army and said to his companions that Abrahah has gone mad, whereas the Yemenis were unanimous as to Abrahah's excellence in faith, wisdom, and courage.

ʿUrwah al-Dimashqī, in order to maintain the morale of the Syrian army, stepped into the battleground, shouting, 'If Muʿāwiyah turned away from fighting you, ʿAlī, be prepared to fight me!'

The Imam's (A) companions, aware of ʿUrwah's lowliness, advised the Imam to refrain from fighting him, but the Imam said, 'Muʿāwiyah and ʿUrwah are on a par to us.' The Imam attacked ʿUrwah and cut him asunder with the first strike. Both armies were frightened of the Imam's (A) heavy blow. Turning towards ʿUrwah's dead body that had been cut into two halves, the Imam (A) said, 'By God, who made Muḥammad His prophet! You saw the hellfire and you regretted your past deeds.'

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 443; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 82.

It was at that time that 'Urwah's cousin arose to challenge the Imam (A) and thus seek vengeance for his cousin, but he met the same fate at the sword of the Imam (A).[1]

History Repeats Itself

The Syrians were in fear of the Imam's (A) unrivalled feats of courage in the battlefield. Observing the circumstances from the top of a hill, Mu'āwiyah thus censured the Syrians, 'May you perish! Is there not anyone among you to take Abū al-Ḥasan's [i.e. 'Alī's] life in the heat of the battle?'

Standing beside Mu'āwiyah, Walīd ibn 'Utbah said, 'Such feat of courage befits you.'

Mu'āwiyah said, 'I was challenged to fight by 'Alī once, but I never confronted him in a duel, since a commander should be protected by the army.' He finally encouraged Busr ibn Arṭāh to fight the Imam (A), saying, 'Fight with him in the cover of the dust.'

Busr's cousin who had just arrived in Syria from Hejaz tried to discourage him from fighting with the Imam (A), but Busr, standing on his word, proceeded towards the battlefield in armour and challenged 'Alī (A) to battle. Thrust onto the ground by the Imam's (A) spear, Busr, similar to 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, bared his private parts and the Imam was thus dissuaded from pursuing him.[2]

Mu'āwiyah's Insistence on Calling a Truce

The full-scale Battle of Ṣiffīn, dragging on and inflicting heavy casualties on the Syrian army, led Mu'āwiyah to persuade the Imam (A), in one way or another, to call a truce and allow both armies to retreat to their former positions. In his pursuit of achieving peace he took three initiatives, among others:

1. negotiating with Ash'ath ibn Sa'd;
2. negotiating with Qays ibn Sa'd;
3. writing a letter to the Imam (A).

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 455; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 94.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 459.

However, such stratagems proved futile owing to the high morale of the Imam's (A) army. Besides, the Night of Clamour (*laylat al-harīr*) occurred and Mu'āwiyah's military organisation was in danger of total collapse, but the course of events was changed to the favour of the Syrian army by Mu'āwiyah's deceitfulness, Iraqi simple-mindedness, and the efforts of the Syrian fifth column in the Imam's (A) army.

Let us treat in more detail the negotiations held by Mu'āwiyah.

1. Mu'āwiyah summoned his brother, 'Utbah ibn Abī Sufyān, an eloquent man, and assigned him to meet with Ash'ath ibn Qays, a man of considerable influence in the Imam's army, and ask him to have mercy on the survivors of both parties. 'Utbah made his way to the front line, introduced himself, and asked for Ash'ath to convey Mu'āwiyah's message to him. Ash'ath recognised him, saying that 'Utbah was a man disobedient to God with whom he had to hold a meeting.

'Utbah thus conveyed the message, 'Had Mu'āwiyah wished to meet anybody besides 'Alī he would have held a meeting with you, since you are the chief of the Iraqis and the Yemenis and 'Uthmān's son-in-law and his representative. You are different from Mālik al-Ashtar and 'Adī ibn Ḥātim. The former had a hand in the assassination of 'Uthmān and the latter provoked the assassination. I do not ask you to abandon 'Alī and render assistance to Mu'āwiyah, but I call you to protect the survivors of the battle, a task wherein lies our interests.'

In his response, Ash'ath paid tribute to the Imam (A), saying that 'Alī was the chief of Iraq and Yemen, but at the close of his words, he diplomatically welcomed the peace offer, saying, 'Your urgent need to protect the survivors is not less significant than ours.'

When 'Utbah related Ash'ath's words to Mu'āwiyah, the latter said, 'He is inclined towards calling a truce.'[1]

2. As the companions of the Prophet (S), from among the Migrants and the Helpers, encircled the Imam (A), there were only two men from the Helpers, Nu'mān ibn Bashīr and Maslamah ibn Mukhallad, who collaborated with Mu'āwiyah. Mu'āwiyah ordered Nu'mān ibn Bashīr to meet with Qays ibn Sa'd, the courageous commander of the

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 408; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 61; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 102; *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, vol. 1, p. 503.

Imam's (A) army, and curry favour with him in order to pave the way for calling a truce.

In his meeting with Qays, Nuʿmān laid emphasis on the casualties incurred by both parties, saying, 'What you see has been seized from you and us by the war. Fear God as to the survivors [and find some solution to the issue].' In his response to Nuʿmān, Qays emphasised the devotion of the adherents of Muʿāwiyah and ʿAlī (A), saying, 'It was in the time of the Prophet (S) that we confronted the swords and spears of the enemy with our faces and throats and the truth thus became triumphant, despite disbelievers' consternation. O Nuʿmān! The adherents of Muʿāwiyah are but freed and deceived desert dwellers and Yemenis. Look at ʿAlī who is encircled by the Migrants, the Helpers, and the successors to the Prophet's companions with whom God is pleased. In contrast, Muʿāwiyah is only accompanied by you and your friend, Maslamah ibn Mukhallad. You neither participated in the battles of Badr and Uḥud nor were you among the early converts to Islam nor does any Qur'anic verse make a reference to you. If you are against us, you follow in your father's footsteps.'[1]

3. By holding such meetings Muʿāwiyah aimed at clearing the path for calling a truth and making reconciliation, but he failed to achieve his goal. As a consequence, he resorted to writing a letter to the Imam (A) in which he requested once again what he had demanded in his early days of disobedience – being installed as the governor of Syria without pledging allegiance or obedience to the Imam (A). He added, 'We are all descendants of ʿAbd Manāf and none of us excels others in superiority unless he neither humiliates a respectable man nor enslaves a free man.'

The Imam (A) summoned his scribe, Ibn Abī Rāfiʿ, and ordered him to write down the reply to Muʿāwiyah's letter as he dictates it. The text of the Imam's letter is recorded in *Nahj al-Balāghah* as Letter 17.[2]

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[1] Reference is here made to the event of Saqīfah when Bashīr, Nuʿmān's father, unwilling to the caliphate of Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah, Qays' father and his cousin, arose to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr and thus disrupted the Helpers' accord; see *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 448; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 8, p. 87; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 97.

[2] In terms of content, the letter included in *Nahj al-Balāghah* is different to the ones cited in *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl* (p. 187), *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah* (pp. 103–104), and *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn* (p. 471).

19

Alteration in the Course of the Battle of Ṣiffīn and the History of Islam

It was at the daybreak of Tuesday 10 Rabīʿ al-Awwal 38 / 16 August 657 that the Imam (A) performed the dawn prayer together with his companions. He was fully aware of the weakness and weariness of the Syrian army and that the enemy had retreated to the furthermost trench and that the tent of the warmongering Muʿāwiyah could be seized by one vigorous attack. The Imam (A) thus commanded al-Ashtar to arrange the army. He proceeded towards the army in armour and, reclining on his spear, he shouted, 'Line up! May God bless you!'

The two armies engaged before long and the vestiges of the enemy's defeat were soon in display by their flight from the battleground. It was at that time that a man stepped out of the Syrian army and asked to meet with the Imam (A). The Imam conversed with him between the two lines. The man suggested that both parties retreat to their former positions and the Imam vest the governorship of Syria in Muʿāwiyah.

The Imam (A) thanked him for his suggestion and said that he had thought about the issue for long, but he had found only two choices – to battle the disobedient or to disobey God and what had been revealed to His prophet, and that God would not be satisfied with disobedience and sin committed in His land and that the others remain silent against such transgression and turn away from enjoining good and forbidding wrong. As a result, the Imam said that he preferred fighting with the disobedient over entanglement with fetters and chains. The man, disappointed with not gaining the Imam's approval, returned towards the Syrian army as he uttered '*God, we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return*' (2:156).[1]

A ferocious battle resumed between the two parties in which any kind of weapon, such as arrows, rocks, swords, and spears rained on them. The battle dragged on until Wednesday morning. Suffering innumerable casualties, Muʿāwiyah's army howled like dogs, hence the designation of that Wednesday evening as the Night of Clamour (*laylat al-harīr*). Mālik al-Ashtar moved between the lines saying, 'O people! There is the distance of a bow from victory.' He shouted, 'Is there someone willing to sell his life to God and fight on the side of al-Ashtar until he gains victory or meets God?'[2]

It was in those critical moments that the Imam (A) delivered a speech for the commanders and dignitaries of his army. He said, 'O people! You notice the sensitivity of the issue and that the enemy is at the end of his rope. The beginning of any task is assayed by its end. I will take them to the divine tribunal in the morning and will put an end to their disgraceful existence.'[3]

Notified of the Imam's (A) speech, Muʿāwiyah turned to ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, saying, 'This is the night when ʿAlī will determine the fate of the battle that will be fought in the morning. What should be done now?'

He replied, 'Neither your soldiers are like his nor are you comparable to him. He fights in the cause of his beliefs and religion, but your motives are different. You seek to survive but he seeks martyrdom. The Iraqi army fear your victory over them, but the Syrian army are not horrified by ʿAlī's gaining victory.'

Muʿāwiyah asked, 'So, what is to be done?'

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ replied, 'Some proposal should be made that accepting or declining it will sow discord among them. Call them to the Book of God that it may arbitrate between you and them. You will thus achieve your goal. I had been reflecting on this suggestion for long, but I postponed it until the time would be ripe for it.' Muʿāwiyah thanked his collaborator for his plan and reflected on putting it into action.

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[1] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 187; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 474; *Aʿyān al-Shīʿah*, vol. 1, p. 510.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, p. 26; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 475; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 160.

[3] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 476; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 188; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 108.

It was Thursday morning on 13 Rabīʿ al-Awwal / 19 August or, according to some reports, 13 Ṣafar / 21 June that the Imam's (A) army faced a unique scheme. The service rendered by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ to the Syrian insurgent forces reinvigorated the Umayyad clan and paved their path to return to public life.

Following ʿAmr's orders, the Syrian army raised leaves of the Qur'an on their spearheads. The colossal copy of the Qur'an from Damascus was carried by ten men on spearheads. They all shouted the slogan, 'The Book of God will arbitrate between you and us.' The Iraqis heard the slogans and their glances were fixed on the spearheads. They heard but the pitiable slogans and cries of the Syrians who shouted, 'O Arabs! Remember God for the sake of your wives and daughters. By God! Remember God and your religion. Who will guard the Syrian borders besides the Syrians? Who will guard the Iraqi borders besides the Iraqis? Who will survive to fight the Romans, the Turks, and other disbelievers?'[1]

Many soldiers in the Imam's (A) army were deeply impressed by the sight of the Qur'an parchments raised on spearheads and the pitiable cries of the Syrians. The warriors who impressed others by their prowess and military feats and were a few steps away from gaining victory looked like enchanted people riveted to the spot. Nevertheless, lions like ʿAdī ibn Ḥātim, Mālik al-Ashtar, and ʿAmr ibn Ḥamiq were aware of the scheme and that the enemies were at the end of their rope and they simply resorted to that ruse in order to deliver themselves from their entanglement as they would never obey the Qur'anic precepts.

ʿAdī thus said to the Imam (A), 'The army of disbelievers may never confront the truth. Both parties have suffered casualties and those of us who have survived are stronger than them. Do not listen to the cries of the Syrians. We are with you.'

Mālik said, 'Muʿāwiyah has nobody to succeed him, but you have successors. He has forces at his command but they lack the fortitude of your men. Strike iron with iron and invoke God for assistance.'

ʿAmr said, 'Dear ʿAlī, our support for you does not ensue from prejudice, but we support you in the cause of God…Now the truth has come to its point of determination and we are devotedly on your side.'[2]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 481; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 188; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 400; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 26; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 160.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 482; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 108; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 401.

However, Ash'ath ibn Qays – who pretended that he followed 'Alī (A) but his suspicious moves had been in display from the beginning and his ties with Mu'āwiyah were more or less exposed – said to the Imam (A), 'Listen to the call of the people that you are most befittingly in a position to do so. People favour life and disfavour fighting.'

Aware of his evil intentions, the Imam (A) said, 'This issue needs to be further investigated.'[1]

Mu'āwiyah, aiming at provoking the sentiments of the Imam's army, commanded 'Abd Allāh, son of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, a pretender to piety, to position himself between the two armies and call them to welcome the arbitration of the Book of God. Following his orders, 'Abd Allāh said in a loud voice, 'People! If our battle is for the cause of our faith, each of the two groups has produced decisive arguments to the opposing party. If our battle was for the sake of worldly gains, both parties have transgressed the limit. We call you to the arbitration of the Book of God. Even if you had called us to such arbitration we would have answered your call. Seize the opportunity.'

The dispersed enemy army and the simple-minded Iraqis were deceived by such slogans and a considerable number of people turned towards the Imam (A), requesting him to answer their call. Aiming at enlightening the deceived, the Imam (A) in those critical moments thus addressed them, 'O servants of God! I most befittingly expected to answer the call to the arbitration of the Qur'an, but Mu'āwiyah, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Ibn Abī al-Mu'ayṭ, Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah, and Ibn Abī Sarḥ do not believe in Islam and the Qur'an. I know them better than you do. I have been with them from an early age. They have been always the worst children and adults. By God! They have not raised the Qur'an parchments to know and act upon it, but they are acting according to their plan and ruse. O servants of God! Lend me your heads and arms for a while that the truth has come to its final stage there are a few steps from eradicating the tyrants and wrongdoers.'

As the devoted Muslims supported the Imam's (A) view, twenty thousand Iraqi soldiers in armour with callous foreheads [i.e. a sign of their piety] and carrying swords[2] of a sudden turned away from the battleground and proceeded towards their camp. They were led by individuals like Mis'ar ibn Fadakī, Zayd ibn Ḥuṣayn, and some Iraqi Qur'an reciters who later became chiefs of the Khawārij (Seceders).

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 482; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 108; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 401.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 489; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 27; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 401; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 161.

Standing before the Imam's (A) place, they most discourteously addressed him by saying 'O 'Alī!' rather than 'O Commander of the Faithful!' They continued, 'Answer to the call of the people or we will take your life as we took the life of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. By God! We will slay you if you fail to answer their call!'

The commander whose orders were absolutely followed is now being asked to surrender and welcome the call of truce. In response the Imam (A) said, 'I was the first to call others to the Book of God and the first who answered the call to the Book. I am not supposed to call you to anything other than the Book of God. I fight with them as they do not obey the precepts of the Qur'an. They disobeyed God and violated their covenant to Him. They turned away from His Book. I declare that they have deceived you. They do not seek to act upon the Qur'an.'

They were not affected by the Imam's (A) powerful arguments and it was proved by the passage of time that they were ignorant extremists influenced by the empty slogans of the Syrians. The more their Imam provided them with wise advice, the more they grew obstinate. They said that the Imam had to order al-Ashtar to desist from fighting. There is nothing more devastating in an army than discord and mutiny led by simple-minded and politically ignorant people against a wise commander. The Imam (A) knew he was but a few steps from victory and he was aware of the true intentions of the enemy lying behind the proposal. Nevertheless, he also knew that the army's unity could be disrupted by discord.

The Imam (A) believed that it would be injudicious to put up resistance against a thousand armed men who laid claim to piety and their foreheads had become callous out of innumerable prostrations in prayer. He called an acquaintance by the name of Yazīd ibn Hānī and said to him, 'Depart for the battleground where al-Ashtar is fighting and ask him to desist from fighting and come to me immediately.'

Yazīd ibn Hānī proceeded to the front line and said to al-Ashtar, 'The Imam commands you to desist from fighting and he bids you to join him.'

Mālik al-Ashtar said, 'Convey my greetings to the Imam and say that it is not the right time to call me from the battlefield. We hope that the breeze of victory will, before long, blow onto the standard of Islam.'

The messenger returned, saying, 'Mālik believes that desisting from fighting would be unwise as he is a few steps away from victory.'

The rebels said to the Imam (A), 'You have ordered him not to desist from battle. You have conveyed a message to him to put up resistance in the battleground.'

The Imam (A) most calmly replied, 'I did not convey any message by my messenger other than what you heard. How do you accuse me of something against what I said overtly?'

The rebels said, 'Call immediately for al-Ashtar to return from the field, otherwise we will slay you similar to what we did to 'Uthmān or we will surrender you to Mu'āwiyah.'

The Imam (A) asked Yazīd ibn Hānī to report what he had seen to al-Ashtar. Having heard the Imam's (A) message, Mālik al-Ashtar said to the messenger, 'Such sedition ensues from raising Qur'an parchments on spearheads, a ruse devised by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ.'

He said to the messenger with a heavy heart, 'Do you not see the victory and the divine sign? Will it be wise to leave the battleground in such circumstances?'

The messenger replied, 'Will it be wise to stay here and let the Commander of the Faithful be slain or surrendered to the enemy?' A cold shiver ran down Mālik's spine. He immediately desisted from battle and departed to meet the Imam (A).

The Imam (A) thus addressed the rebels who sought surrender, 'Now that you have gained superiority over the enemy and you are a few steps away from victory you are being deceived by them? By God! Never welcome the proposal of those who have turned away from divine command and the prophetic tradition. Provide me with some respite that I put an end to this issue.'

The rebels said, 'Siding with you will be on a par with sharing the blame of your error.'

Mālik said, 'Alas! It is a pity that the worthy among you have fallen in battle and the lowly among you have survived. Tell me when you sided with the truth. Were you siding with the truth in your fighting and now you are siding with truth as you have desisted from battle? Or you erred when you were fighting and now you are siding with the truth? If you believe in this, all your fallen peers whose faith, fear of God, and devotion are acknowledged by you must be in the hellfire.'

The rebels said, 'We fought in the cause of God and we desist from battle in the same cause. We do not follow you. Stay away from us!'

Mālik said, 'You have been deceived and you have been thus called to desist from battle. You, the people with callous foreheads, have disgraced yourselves. I used to think that your prayers were a token of detachment from worldly gains and a sign of your enthusiasm to embrace martyrdom. Now, it is certain that you intend to flee from death and turn towards the world. Woe unto you! You are like dung-eating animals. You shall never gain dignity. Go away as wrongdoers did likewise.'

It was at that time that the rebels, on the one side, and Mālik, on the other, verbally abused each other and whipped the faces of each other's horses. The Imam (A) was so grieved by the scene that he said to them in a loud voice to distance themselves from each other. The opportunist rebels gained a small victory for themselves by shouting in front of the Imam (A) that he was happy with the arbitration of the Qur'an. The Imam (A) was silent, deeply reflecting on the issue.[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 489–492; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 216–219.

20

The Issue of Arbitration and the Dissenting Faction

The suggestion of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ to Muʿāwiyah to call the Imam's (A) army to the arbitration of the Qur'an and that their acceptance or refusal would sow discord among them proved quite effective. The majority consisted of simple-minded people who, weary of the battle, were deceived by the false front put up by Muʿāwiyah and shouted, without the Imam's (A) permission, that ʿAlī was satisfied with the arbitration of the Qur'an. The Imam (A) remained silent and reflected on the future of Islam.[1]

Muʿāwiyah's Letter to the Imam (A)

It was in such critical moments that Muʿāwiyah thus wrote to the Imam (A), 'The difference between us has dragged too long. Each of us believes that he is on the side of truth in what he seeks from the other party, but neither of the two parties is obedient to the other. Both parties have incurred heavy casualties and I fear that further casualties will be in store. You and I are the only ones that assume the responsibility for waging this battle. My suggestion, aiming at the survival and improvement of the conditions of the *ummah*, protecting its lives, religious reconciliation, and fading away of enmities is that one of your trusted companions and one of mine hold a meeting and arbitrate on the basis of the Qur'an. This will be in our interests and the discord will thus wither away. Fear God and be content with the judgement of the Qur'an if you believe in it.'[2]

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 104.

[2] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 191; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 493.

Raising the Qur'an parchments on spearheads was simply a ruse aimed at sowing discord, but it could never lead to the arbitration of the Qur'an. This is exhibited in Muʿāwiyah's letter addressed to the Imam (A) in which he suggested the election of a representative from each of the two parties. It was in utter audacity that he closed his letter with calling the Imam (A) to God wariness and following the precepts of the Qur'an!

The Imam's (A) Response to Muʿāwiyah's Letter

> Disobedience to God and untruth lead man to perdition in this world and the hereafter and his error will be detected by scrutiny. You know that you will not be able to compensate for your past deeds. Some people unjustly violated the covenant, aspired to assume the caliphate, and misinterpreted the self-evident divine commands, but their untrue claims were divinely made obvious. Stand in fear of the day when the one who has done meritorious deeds will be happy and the one who has followed Satan and has failed to battle Satan will regret that he was deceived by the world and he set his heart on it.
>
> You have called us to follow the judgement of the Qur'an, but you do not believe in the Qur'an. We did not provide you with a reply but we welcome the arbitration of the Qur'an.[1]

Ashʿath ibn Qays who stood accused, from the beginning, of having clandestine ties with Muʿāwiyah (and such ties were at times exposed in the course of the battle) insisted to meet with Muʿāwiyah and inquire about raising the Qur'an parchments on spearheads.[2] Ashʿath was not honest with the Imam (A) from the beginning. He thought about calling a truce by holding negotiations with ʿUtbah, Muʿāwiyah's brother. It was on the Night of Clamour that he said that continuation of the battle would lead to the perdition of both parties. When the Qur'an parchments were raised on spearheads he insisted that ʿAlī should answer the call of the Syrian army and consider the weariness of the forces. Now, he asked for permission to contact Mu'āwiyah and receive the last order as to calling a truce.

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[1] Both letters are included by Ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī in his *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn* (pp. 493–494) and Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī in his *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (vol. 3, p. 322). The Imam's (A) letter, with variants in its text, is also included in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (no. 48) and its abridgement is to be found in Dīnawarī's *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl* (p. 191).

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 28; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 161.

It will be mentioned below that Ash'ath divested the Imam (A) of the authority to appoint a representative. He even found some excuses to disqualify the Imam's representative and manipulated the situation by introducing his own representative that proved a total loss to the Iraqi army. Ash'ath met with Mu'āwiyah but he simply reiterated the contents of Mu'āwiyah's letter.

The armed insurgent group forced the Imam (A) to accept the arbitration of the Book. The Qur'an reciters from both groups assembled between the two armies, glanced at the Qur'an, and made up their minds to reinvigorate the arbitration of the Book. They then returned to their positions and the shouts of consenting to the arbitration of the Qur'an reverberated in both groups.[1]

Selection of the Arbitrators

The Qur'an does not indubitably speak of its own, but those versed in the Book need to make it speak, reflect on its contents, discern the divine judgement, and thereby suggest some solution to an issue. Some individuals were therefore selected from the Syrians and the Iraqis. The Syrians unconditionally followed Mu'āwiyah in his selection of a qualified representative and they all knew that he would select but 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, the one who had devised the ruse. It was commonly known that the Syrians were most obedient to the created being and most disobedient to the Creator.

When it was the Imam's (A) turn to select a representative, the dissenting faction, who were later designated as the Khawārij, regarded as a grave sin the issue of arbitration, repented of their acceptance of the process, and expected 'Alī (A) to repent of it as well, and further imposed two conditions on the Imam (A): (a) acceptance of arbitration; (b) selection of their own arbitrator rather than that of the Imam (A).

An instructive historical report will be related.

> The faction said, 'We accept Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī to serve as the arbitrator.'

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 28; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 161.

The Imam (A) said, 'I will not be content with such suggestion and will never vest arbitration in him.'

The faction said, 'We will not select anybody else for arbitration. He was the man who dissuaded us from the beginning from this battle and termed it "sedition".'

The Imam (A) said, 'Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī seceded from me in my early days of my caliphate and dissuaded people from supporting me and fled from punishment until I granted him safety and he returned to me. I choose Ibn 'Abbās for arbitration.'

The faction said, 'You and Ibn 'Abbās are the same to us. Select somebody to be impartial towards you and Mu'āwiyah.'

The Imam (A) said, 'I choose Mālik al-Ashtar.'

The faction said, 'Mālik is the one who fanned the flames of the battle and we are now entangled with his judgement.'

The Imam asked, 'What is his judgement?'

The faction said, 'He intends to sow discord among people to fulfil his and your wish.'

The Imam said, 'If Mu'āwiyah is totally free to choose his arbitrator, it will be befitting to choose a Qurayshī [Ibn 'Abbās] against another Qurayshī ['Amr ibn al-'Āṣ]. Choose 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās to match 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ. He is the only one who may tie or untie what 'Amr ties or unties. Ibn 'Abbās is the one who weakens or strengthens what 'Amr strengthens or weakens.'

Ash'ath said, "Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās are from the tribe of Muḍar and two individuals from the tribe of Muḍar are not supposed to be involved in arbitration. If one is from the tribe of Muḍar [e.g. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ], the other should be from Yemen [i.e. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī].' He was not asked about the basis of his unfounded argument!

The Imam (A) said, 'I fear that the Yemeni be deceived by you, as 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ leaves no stone unturned to achieve his goals.'

Ash'ath said, 'By God! It will be in our interest if one of the two arbitrators is from Yemen, even though his arbitration will be against our objective. It will not be in our interest if both of them happen to be from the tribe of Muḍar, even if their arbitration proves to be in our interest.'

The Imam (A) said, 'Now that you insist on the selection of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, you know best. Do what you will!'[1]

Serving as the governor of Kufa, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī dissuaded people from supporting the Imam (A) with a view to quelling the insurgence which led to the Battle of Jamal (the Camel). In so doing he resorted to the prophetic hadith, 'When some sedition arises in my *ummah*, keep out of it.' Such a person wished to serve as the Imam's (A) representative in arbitration. Besides his simple-mindedness, he was undoubtedly against the Imam and he would not arbitrate in his interest.

The Imam (A) still endeavoured to call the faction to tread the straight path. He summoned all his commanders to attend a meeting where he said, 'Behold that the Syrians have chosen an arbitrator from among those with whom they are satisfied and you have chosen an arbitrator from among those with whom you are dissatisfied. You are dealing with the likes of 'Abd Allāh ibn Qays [i.e. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī], the one who said, "Battle is sedition. Cut off the bow strings and sheathe the swords." If he is honest, why did he intentionally participate in the battle and if he is dishonest he has done wrong. Shatter the chest of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ by the clenched fist of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, make use of the respite, and control the frontiers of Islam. Do you not see that your cities have been violated and your land has been targeted by the enemy?'[2]

The Imam's (A) speech only led to private meetings with commanders. Aḥnaf ibn Qays thus said to the Imam, 'I have tried Abū Mūsā and have noticed that he was a shallow man who fought with the Islamic faith in its early days. If you please, select me as the arbitrator and if you do not deem such selection fit and appropriate, appoint me as the second or the third arbitrator and you will see that I will be able to find solutions to the problems caused by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ.'

The Imam (A) suggested to the army that Aḥnaf could serve as the arbitrator, but they were in such error and they had grown so obstinate that they would not consent to the representation of anybody else. Such disastrous selection is reflected in some lines by a Syrian poet:

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[1] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 192; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 113; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 189; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 499; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 402.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 233; *'Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 4, p. 309; al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 11; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 309.

> Had the Iraqi people been endowed with sound reason,
> they would have been protected from being led astray,
> they would have chosen Ibn 'Abbās,
> but they selected the old man from Yemen who is 'entangled with five and six'.
> Let 'Alī know the words of the one who stands in no fear of truth:
> Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī is not to be trusted.[1]

It will be related below that those who imposed reconciliation with Mu'āwiyah on the Imam (A) and declined his selection of the arbitrator had been those who had considered arbitration a grave sin and having concluded the peace treaty, insisted that the Imam (A) had to violate it. However, the Imam (A) would never violate a treaty and listen to the words of such ignorant pretenders to piety.

Now, let us take a glance at the arbitration and see if the Imam (A) submitted to the faction for a third time.

Imposition of the Treaty of Arbitration

The incident of arbitration in Ṣiffīn was an unprecedented event in the history of Islam. The Commander of the Faithful (A) had been a few steps away from victory and had his ignorant followers not desisted from supporting him or had they not caused him trouble, he would have quelled the insurgence and would have put an end to the vicious Umayyad rule that would last for eighty years or so thereafter, changing the course of Islamic history. Nevertheless, he had to desist from resuming the battle and gaining victory owing to the simple-mindedness of a considerable number of his ignorant warriors.

Such ignorant followers – the vicious consequences of their misdeeds far exceeded those of their wise enemies – imposed four conditions on the Imam (A) and they were the first to suffer their consequences:

1. consenting to calling a truce and accepting the arbitration of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition;

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 502; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 193.

2. consenting to the representation of the Imam (A) by Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī;
3. omission of the title 'Commander of the Faithful' from the arbitration treaty;
4. insisting on violating the arbitration treaty following its conclusion.

The manner of imposing the first two matters was discussed above. Now, we treat the manner of imposition of the third and fourth conditions as well as the peace treaty.

The storm raised by the diplomatic war and verbal disputes, consequent to raising Qur'an parchments on spearheads, had abated and the leaders of both parties were supposed to draw up the arbitration treaty. The Imam (A) and his companions were on one side and Mu'āwiyah and his mastermind, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, and some of his guards, were on the other. The treaty was drawn up on two yellow pages the beginning and the end of which bore the seals of the Imam (A) and Mu'āwiyah with the emblem 'Muḥammad (S) is the Messenger of God'. The Imam (A) dictated the treaty and his scribe, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfi', committed it to paper.

The Imam (A) thus opened the treaty: 'In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. This is the declaration as per which 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, and Mu'āwiyah and their followers acknowledge the arbitration of the Book of God and the tradition of His prophet.'

Mu'āwiyah rose up in excitement, saying, 'It would be a vicious man to recognise somebody as the Commander of the Faithful and then fight with him.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ immediately said to the Imam's (A) scribe, 'Write the name of 'Alī and that of his father. He is your commander not ours.'

Aḥnaf, the courageous commander of the Imam (A), said to him, 'Behold that if you have the title "Commander of the Faithful" deleted after your name, you may never be addressed as such any longer. Do not submit to such mistreatment even at risk of bloodshed.' The dispute over keeping or leaving out the title dragged on for long and the Imam (A) did not consent to the omission of the title 'Commander of the Faithful' which followed his name. Ash'ath ibn Qays, the unscrupulous man who pretended to follow the Imam but had clandestine ties with Mu'āwiyah insisted on the omission of the title.

It was in that dispute that the Imam (A) recalled the bitter memory of the peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, saying, 'I was the Prophet's (S) scribe in Ḥudaybiyyah. The Messenger of God (S) was on one side and Suhayl ibn 'Amr, the representative of the disbelievers, was on the other. I thus wrote the peace treaty: "Muḥammad the Messenger of God (S) and Suhayl ibn 'Amr consented to this." However, the disbelievers' representative said to the Prophet, "I never sign the letter in which you call yourself the Messenger of God. Had I recognised you as the Messenger of God, I would have never fought with you. I would be a tyrant and a wrongdoer if I impeded you from visiting the House of God, granted that you be the Messenger of God. Write "Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh" and I will consent to it.'

The Prophet (S) then said to me, "Alī! I am the Messenger of God, as I am 'Abd Allāh's son. My apostleship shall never fade away by omitting the title "Messenger of God" that follows my name. Write "Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh." The disbelievers forced me to leave out the title "Messenger of God" that followed his name. The Prophet wrote a peace treaty for polytheists on that day and now I am writing one for their descendants. I follow the footsteps of the Messenger of God.'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said to 'Alī (A), 'Glorified is God! You liken us to disbelievers whereas we are believers.'

The Imam (A) said, 'When was it that you did not support disbelievers and you were not the enemy of Muslims? You take after your mother.'

'Amr rose up, saying, 'By God! I shall never sit in your company.'

The Imam's (A) false friends' insistence of removing 'Commander of the Faithful' further exhibits the wrongs done to him.[1] In contrast, a number of the devoted followers of the Imam (A) unsheathed their swords and met with him, saying, 'We shall act upon your command.' 'Uthmān ibn Ḥanīf provided them with advice, saying, 'I was a witness to the peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and we now follow in the Prophet's (A) footsteps.'[2]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn* (2nd ed., Egypt), pp. 508–509; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 194; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 114; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 29; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 162; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 189 (with minor variations); Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 232.

[2] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 112.

The Imam (A) said, 'The Prophet (S) had informed me in Ḥudaybiyyah of this incident by saying, "You will face such a day and you will do likewise out of necessity."'

The Text of the Peace Treaty

The argumentation came to an end through the Imam's flexibility and following the course formerly taken by the Prophet (S). 'Alī (A) consented to the removal of 'Commander of the Faithful' and the writing of the arbitration treaty resumed, the highlights of which are as follows:

1. Both parties consented to submit to the arbitration of the Qur'an and obedience to its precepts and that nothing but the Qur'an could unite them and the Book of God, in its entirety, would serve as the arbitrator with respect to their differences.
2. 'Alī (A) and his followers selected 'Abd Allāh ibn Qays [i.e. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī] as the arbitrator and Mu'āwiyah and his followers chose 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ to serve in this capacity.
3. Both parties swore by a solemn covenant, between God and His servants, that they would act upon the arbitration of the Book of God and if such arbitration could not be found, they would refer to the prophetic tradition. They also consented to avoid fanning the flames of discord, following worldly pursuits, and involvement in similar misdeeds.
4. 'Abd Allāh ibn Qays and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ had their leaders swear by God that they would consent to their arbitration which had to be based on the Book of God and the prophetic tradition. They also consented to refrain from violating the arbitration and substituting it for anything else and that the lives, possessions, and dignity of both of them would be protected under the rule of the two leaders as far as they do not deviate from the path of truth.
5. In case one of the two arbitrators passes away prior to the accomplishment of his mission, the leader of that party will appoint a just arbitrator to replace him. In case one of the two leaders passes away prior to completion of arbitration, his followers may appoint another leader to substitute the deceased leader.
6. Both arbitrators promise to make their utmost effort and to avoid unjust arbitration. In case they fail to act upon their commitment, the

ummah will turn away from their arbitration and will not have any commitment to their arbitration. It is incumbent on the commanders, the arbitrators, and the *ummah* to act upon the treaty and the lives, possessions, and dignity of people will be protected until the expiry of the treaty. No weapon will be used and the roads will be safe to travel. All those present and absent in the process of arbitration will be equally treated.

7. It is incumbent upon both arbitrators to dismount in a spot between Iraq and Syria on their own, unaccompanied by their companions. Their respite for the completion of arbitration shall be the end of the holy month of Ramaḍān, but they will be able to postpone their arbitration to the end of the time span required for the completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).
8. In case the two arbitrators fail to arbitrate on the basis of the Book of God and the prophetic tradition, Muslims will resume the battle and there shall be no obligation between the two parties. It is incumbent on the Muslim community to act upon the contents of this treaty and they are supposed to be united in confronting those who try to impose their views on them or those who intend to violate it.[1]

It is reported by al-Ṭabarī that ten witnesses from each party signed the arbitration treaty. The witnesses from the Imam's (A) party included 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās; Ash'ath ibn Qays; Mālik al-Ashtar; Sa'īd ibn Qays al-Hamdānī; Khabbāb ibn Aratt; Sahl ibn Ḥanīf; 'Amr ibn Ḥamiq al-Khuzā'ī; the children of the Imam (A), Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (A).[2] The treaty was drawn up and signed by both parties on Wednesday evening 17 Ṣafar 37 / 4 August 657.[3]

Both arbitrators decided to dismount in Adhruḥ, lying between Syria and Hejaz, and to conduct the process of arbitration. Four hundred men from both parties were dispatched to supervise the arbitration process.

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[1] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 403; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 29; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 195.

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 30; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 510; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 163.

[3] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 163.

The Reaction of the Imam's (A) Army to the Conclusion of the Arbitration Treaty

After drafting the treaty the people of Syria and Iraq were supposed to be informed of the results of negotiations. Ash'ath thus notified the Syrians and the Iraqis of the arbitration treaty. There was no protest on the part of the Syrians, but there were some Iraqi clans like 'Anazah who objected to the treaty. The slogan 'Judgement belongs only to God'[1] was first shouted by Ma'dān and Ja'd, two young men from 'Anazah who charged towards Mu'āwiyah's army wielding their swords. They were slain near Mu'āwiyah's tent.

When the tribe of Murād were informed of the treaty, their chief, Ṣāliḥ ibn Shafīq, shouted the slogan which had been used by the two young men. He said, 'Judgement belongs only to God, even though it is disliked by the polytheists.' Then he composed these lines:

> What happened that 'Alī submitted to arbitration as to the bloodshed?
>
> But, there was no fault in his deed when he fought with the parties
> [i.e. Mu'āwiyah and his like-minded followers].

Ash'ath proceeded with his task. Encountering the tribe of Banū Tamīm he reported to them the arbitration treaty and they shouted the slogan: 'Judgement belongs only to God, who judges justly, and He is the best one in distinguishing truth from falsehood.'

'Urwah al-Tamīmī said, 'Are you asking men to arbitrate as to the divine command? Judgement belongs only to God. Where are those of us who fell in the battle, Ash'ath? (Did they fall in the cause of truth or in the cause of falsehood?)'[2]

'Urwah immediately attacked Ash'ath wielding his sword but he struck the latter's horse and the rider fell down from his mount. It was by the intervention of others that Ash'ath was not slain by 'Urwah al-Tamīmī.

Having made a round in the Iraqi army, Ash'ath went to visit the Imam (A), pretending that the majority of the Imam's (A) supporters were satisfied with the arbitration treaty, though a group or two objected to it. The slogans 'Judgement belongs only to God' and 'Arbitration belongs to God not to you, 'Alī' reverberated before long. The protestors shouted, 'We never allow men to arbitrate as to the religion of God (and make alterations in it). God's command is that Mu'āwiyah and his supporters should be either killed or they have to obey our command. The incident of arbitration was our fault and we repent of it. It is incumbent upon you to repent of it; otherwise, we will turn away from you.'[1]

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[1] *Inna al-ḥukm illā li-llāh*, Qur'an 6:57; 40:12, 67. [Translator]

[2] 'Urwah thought that based on that treaty the Iraqi army had been in error and, as a consequent, they would be cast into the Fire; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 512; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 237; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 197; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 163; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 403.

The Fourth Imposition

The ignorant partisans of the Imam (A) were intending to impose on the Imam that he had to ignore the arbitration treaty on the same day and declare it null and void. Nevertheless, the Imam strictly stood against them, saying in a loud voice, 'Woe unto you! Now you are saying this? Now that we have consented to the conclusion of the treaty? Should we resume the battle? Does not God say: "*Keep your agreements*" (5:1)? And He says: "*Fulfil God's covenant when you pledge, and do not break [your] oaths after pledging them solemnly and having made God a witness over yourselves. Indeed, God knows what you do.*" (16:91)'

They were not affected by the Imam's (A) words. They turned away from obedience to him, considered arbitration an error, seceded from the Imam's (A) authority, and were designated as Khawārij (seceders) and Muḥakkimah (those calling for divine judgement).[2] They were considered as the most dangerous of factions. They never fostered any favourable ties with any government, but they adopted their particular ideology and policies which will be discussed in detail in the chapter devoted to the Māriqīn (i.e. the Khawārij).[3] Their errors will be touched upon below and it will be elaborated there that the arbitration of men as to the religion of God, rather than the arbitration of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, was intended. Such arbitration is accurate and well grounded, though suggesting it by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ in such circumstances was a ruse aiming at sowing discord among Muslims.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 237; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 513.

[2] This designation is derived from their slogan, *lā ḥukm illa llāh* (Judgement belongs only to God). [Translator]

[3] The term Māriqīn literally means 'seceders'. [Translator]

The Imam (A) says, 'We did not select men to arbitrate [as to the religion of God] but we chose the Qur'an that is the writing between two covers. It does not speak by tongue but it should be clarified and spoken by men. When the Syrians asked us to choose the Qur'an as the arbitrator, we did not turn away from it, as God says in the Qur'an: "*And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to God and the Messenger*" (4:59). Referring to God means to refer to the Qur'an and referring to the messenger means to refer to his tradition."[1] It is also of interest to know that the Imam further says in that sermon: 'If the Book of God is referred to in arbitration we excel others in merit with respect to it and if the tradition of the Messenger of God is referred to we are the foremost authority as to that.'

The Battle of Ṣiffīn ultimately came to an end on that day, a battle that had preoccupied the Imam (A) and his followers for months, a battle in which twenty to twenty-five thousand men from the Iraqi army were martyred and forty-five thousand, or according to another report ninety thousand, men from the Syrian army lost their lives. The two armies returned to their camps.[2]

Liberation of Captives

The Commander of the Faithful (A), following drafting, concluding, and proclaiming the treaty, unilaterally liberated all the captives of the enemy army. Prior to the liberation of the Syrian captives, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ insisted that Mu'āwiyah should execute the captives of the Imam's (A) army. Having witnessed the Imam's (A) noble deed, he trembled in fear and said to 'Amr, 'If we kill the captives we will be publicly disgraced.'

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 125. This is abridged in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* (vol. 3, part 6, p. 37) in recounting the events of the year 37 AH / 657 CE and also in Ibn Athīr's *Kāmil* (vol. 3, p. 166). Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī in *Kitāb al-Tadhkirah* (p. 100) reports it on the authority of Hishām al-Kalbī. This sermon is also reported by Shaykh al-Mufīd in *Irshād* (p. 129) and al-Ṭabarsī in *Iḥtijāj* (vol. 1, p. 275).

[2] The Battle of Ṣiffīn that had dragged on for 110 days during which ninety attacks were launched came to an end on 17 Ṣafar 37 / 4 August 657, see al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, Cairo, 256. In his *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 305) he records the total number of fatalities as 110,000 (20,000 from the Imam's army and 90,000 from Mu'āwiyah's army). According to another report, he records the total number of fatalities as 70,000 (25,000 from the Imam's army and 45,000 from Mu'āwiyah's army).

The Imam's (A) policy as to the captives was different in that he would liberate the captives unless they had committed murder and their lives had to be taken for retaliation. If a liberated captive was recaptured he would be executed immediately since his return to the enemy's army was indicative of his evil intention.[1]

The Imam (A) Supervises Arbitration

On his way from Ṣiffīn towards Kufa the Imam (A) was not unaware of the process of arbitration and recurrently provided Ibn 'Abbās – who had been dispatched to that region leading 400 men – with instructions. Mu'āwiyah was not unaware of the process of arbitration either and he had also dispatched 400 men to that region. The followers of Mu'āwiyah were different from those of the Imam (A) in that they were blindly obedient to their leader and when some message was received from Mu'āwiyah they never inquired about its contents.

In contrast, when some message from the Imam (A) was received by Ibn 'Abbās, the men inquired about the Imam's (A) instructions to their chief. Ibn 'Abbās thus censured them, saying, 'Whenever I receive a message from the Imam you inquire about the instructions. If I conceal the message from you, you will object and if I disclose it to you, our secret will be divulged.'[2]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 518.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 533; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 37; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 198; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 167.

21

The Imam (A) returned from Ṣiffīn to Kufa

The Imam (A) had been coerced to acknowledge the arbitration as he had seen no other alternative. Had he resisted against it, his Iraqi opponents, supported by Muʿāwiyah's army, would have confronted him and it would have led to the destruction of him and his devoted companions. Therefore, following the completion of the arbitration, the Imam returned to Kufa and dispatched envoys to supervise the arbitration and find solutions to the issues. Upon his departure, he recited this supplication which had been narrated from the Prophet (S): 'O Lord! I seek refuge in You from the hardships of the journey, the sorrows of returning, and the harms to my family and possessions.'

Having recited this supplication, the Imam (A) travelled on the road that led to Kufa passing on the banks of the Euphrates. Upon his arrival at the city of Ṣandawdā',[1] he was welcomed by the tribe of Banū Saʿīd who invited him to stay with them, but the Imam declined their invitation.[2] When he reached Nukhaylah, in the vicinity of Kufa, he saw an ailing old man in the shade of a house. The Imam (A) asked him, 'Why do you look so pale? Are you ill?'

The old man replied, 'Yes, I am.'

The Imam (A) asked, 'Do you dislike your illness?'

The old man replied, 'I did not like to be taken ill.'

The Imam (A) inquired, 'Are such illnesses divinely regarded as something good?'

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[1] A city lying between Syria and Iraq, see Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 86; *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 528.

The old man replied, 'Yes.'

The Imam (A) said, 'I bring you good tidings that you are granted divine mercy and your sins have been divinely forgiven. What is your name?'

The old man said, 'I am Ṣāliḥ, son of Salīm, from the tribe of Salāmān ibn Ṭayy, allied to the tribe of Salīm ibn Manṣūr.'

Deeply amazed, the Imam (A) said, 'How agreeable is your name and those of your father and your allied tribe. Did you participate in our battles?'

The old man said, 'No, I did not, but I was eager to fight on your side. As you see, my ailment which is caused by fever has prevented me from leading an active life.'

The Imam (A) said, 'Listen to the words of God: "*There is no blame on the weak, nor on the sick, nor on those who do not find anything to spend, so long as they are sincere to God and His messenger. There is no* [*cause for*] *blaming the virtuous, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful*" (9:91)'.

The Imam (A) asked, 'What do people think about our affair with the Syrians?'

The old man replied, 'Your malevolent opponents are happy with that but your true supporters are angry and sorrowful.'

The Imam (A) said, 'Quite so! May God forgive your sins because of your illness, as there is no reward for illness, but it may lead to forgivingness of sins. The words and deeds may be rewarded but one is not to neglect from having good intentions, as many people will be divinely admitted to paradise because of their good intentions.'

Having conversed with the old man, the Imam (A) went on his way.[1] He met 'Abd Allāh ibn Wadī'ah al-Anṣārī after a while and inquired about what people thought about the imposed truce with Mu'āwiyah. The Imam (A) asked him, 'What do people think about what we did?'

'Abd Allāh replied, 'People have two views. Some like it and some do not and the Qur'an says: "*they continue to differ*" (11:118).'

The Imam inquired about the individuals with astute views.

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 528; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 33.

ʿAbd Allāh said, 'They are saying that ʿAlī was encircled by a group [of supporters] but he dispersed them. They were in a strong position, but they devastated it. How may they assemble the like of them and reconstruct what they destroyed? They would have acted upon reason and it would have been a sound policy had they continued the battle with the support of their obedient followers until they gained victory or perished in their cause.'

The Imam asked ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wadīʿah al-Anṣārī, 'Who destroyed? I or them [i.e. the Khawārij]? Did I scatter them and did they sow discord? Are you saying that it was the best course of action that I would continue the battle supported by my followers when a group of people had voiced their objection. I was aware of such a view and I was prepared to sacrifice my life most gladly, but I saw that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were more eager than me to embrace martyrdom. I feared that the Prophet (S) would be without progeny. As a result, I did not favour that course of action. By God! If I confront the Syrians again, I will take that course and I will not be accompanied by Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.'[1]

The Imam's (A) candid words with ʿAbd Allāh shed light on two points.

1. The Imam (A) lived in a milieu where people were able to voice their different views as to the then government and proponents and opponents were on a par before the Imam (A) in voicing their opinions and views. People were quite free in that respect so long as they were not involved in armed uprising.
2. Protecting the progeny of the Messenger of God (S), termed in the holy Qur'an as *kawthar*,[2] is an obligation of utmost significance in Islamic teaching. Continuation of the battle by the Imam (A) against Muʿāwiyah, together with numerous internal opponents, would have lead to the martyrdom of the Imam, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn (A). The Prophet (S) would have remained without progeny and the imamate would have come to an end. ʿAlī's (A) acceptance of the arbitration was necessitated by divine will as to the continuity of the generations of the infallible imams ending in the reappearance of the Imam of the Age (A). This was not the only reason behind

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 529–530; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 34; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 164.

[2] See Qur'an 108:1. *Kawthar* literally denotes 'abundance'. [Translator]

accepting the arbitration, but it served as one of the factors that coerced the Imam (A) to recognise the arbitration treaty.

The Imam (A) beside the Tomb of Khabbāb ibn Aratt

On his way, the Imam (A) passed by the houses of Banū 'Awf. He saw seven or eight tombs on a higher spot on the right hand side of the road. He inquired about those who had been buried there. Qudāmah ibn 'Ajlān al-Azdī replied, 'Khabbāb ibn Aratt passed away following your departure for Ṣiffīn and he was interred in a higher spot as it was in his testament. His burial in that spot led others to bury their dead around his tomb.'

The Imam (A) invoked God to grant Khabbāb His mercy and said, 'He converted to Islam most sincerely and immigrated most willingly. He fought in the cause of God all his life and was finally taken ill. The rewards for the righteous will not be divinely ignored.' He went on to say to the spirits of the deceased buried in that spot, 'Greetings to you, dwellers of frightening lands and arid places, from believing Muslim men and women. You preceded us in leaving this world and we will join you before long. O Lord! Forgive us and them and grant us Your mercy. Glorified is God who made the earth a place of assembly for the living and the dead. Glorified is God who created all of us from it and He will make us return to it. He will raise us from it. Good for those who remember resurrection, do righteous deeds for the Day of Reckoning, and live contentedly.'[1]

On his way the Imam (A) passed by the homes of the clans of the tribe of Hamdān and heard the women mourning for their beloved ones who had fallen in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He summoned Shuraḥbīl and said to him, 'Advise your women to maintain their self-composure and avoid mourning so loudly.'

He replied, 'If a few homes had lost their beloved ones, we could act upon your instructions, but one hundred and eighty men have lost their lives from this clan alone. There is no home in which people are not mourning for their beloved ones. Nevertheless, we, the men, never mourn but we are happy with their martyrdom.'

The Imam (A) invoked God to have mercy on their martyred beloved ones. Shuraḥbīl intended to see him off as he was riding his mount. The

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, pp. 529–530; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 34; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 164.

Imam (A) said to him, 'Return, as this manner of seeing off will lead to the false pride of the governor and the humility of the believers.'[1]

Upon his arrival at Kufa, the Imam (A) selected four hundred men to supervise the activities of the two arbitrators. He also appointed Shurayḥ and Ibn ʿAbbās as the military commander and the religious leader of those supervisors respectively. He then had to dispatch Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, the representative whose selection had been imposed on him.[2]

The Imam (A), from the early days of his caliphate, was aware that Abū Mūsā was not satisfied with his rule and the people were also aware of his simple-mindedness. The Imam (A) and the people thus talked to him before his departure.

The Imam's (A) Conversation with Abū Mūsā

Everyone, from opponents and proponents, were unanimous as to Abū Mūsā's simple-mindedness and shallowness and he was known as 'a blunt knife with no handle' and as an intolerant man. What could ʿAlī (A) do? His simple-minded and intolerant friends, mainly the likes of Abū Mūsā, imposed both arbitration and the arbitrator on him.

Upon dispatching Abū Mūsā to Dawmat (or Dūmat) al-Jandal, the Imam (A) thus talked to him and his own scribe, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfiʿ. The Imam (A) said to Abū Mūsā, 'Arbitrate based on the Book of God and do not proceed beyond it.' Following Abū Mūsā's departure, the Imam said, 'I see that he will be deceived in this process.'

ʿUbayd Allāh asked him, 'If you know that he will be deceived, why do you dispatch him?'

The Imam said, 'Had God treated His servants according to His knowledge, He would not have sent prophets to them nor would He have reasoned with them through those prophets.'[3]

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[1] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 531; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 35; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 164.

[2] *Waqʿah Ṣiffīn*, p. 533; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 37; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 406.

[3] Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 2, p. 261.

The Conversation of the Imam's (A) Military Commander with Abū Mūsā

Shurayḥ ibn Hānī, the commander whom the Imam (A) had dispatched to Dawmat al-Jandal as the leader of a group of four hundred men held Abū Mūsā's hand in his and said to him, 'You have assumed a great responsibility and failing in such mission will be irreparable. Behold that if Mu'āwiyah holds sway in Iraq, there will be no Iraq any longer, but if 'Alī rules over Syria, Syrians will not face any problem. You displayed your hesitation in the early days of the Imam's caliphate. If you proceed with such hesitation, the assumption will turn into certitude and hope will turn into despair.'

Abū Mūsā said, 'Those who find faults with me are not supposed to select me for arbitration that I may ward off falsehood from them and restore to them their right.'[1] Najāshī, the well-known poet in the Imam's (A) army and an old friend of Abū Mūsā, composed a poem in which he asked him to observe justice. Having heard the poem, Abū Mūsā said, 'I invoke God to shed light on the horizon and that I satisfy God by accomplishing all I am set out to do.'[2]

Aḥnaf's Conversation with Abū Mūsā

Aḥnaf was the last person to bid farewell to Abū Mūsā. He held Abū Mūsā's hand in his and said to him, 'Appreciate the significance of the issue and know that the matter will proceed. If you devastate Iraq, there will be no Iraq any longer. Avoid disobedience to God that God will grant you reward in this world and the hereafter. Do not be the first person to greet 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ when you see him tomorrow. It is the prophetic tradition to greet others before they greet us, but he does not deserve to be respected as such. Do not hold his hand in yours, since you have the *ummah*'s trust in you. If they offer you the best place to sit, beware of their ruses. Do not allow him to converse with you in private, since he may conceal some people somewhere to bear witness against you.'

Aḥnaf then tried to test Abū Mūsā's devotion to the Imam (A) by thu suggesting to him, 'If you do not manage to come to terms with 'Amr about the Imam, suggest to him that the Iraqis are able to select as caliph a Qurayshī resident of Syria and if such suggestion is declined, suggest that the Syrians are able to select as caliph a Qurayshī resident of Iraq.'[1] Abū Mūsā did not react to the suggestions which were indicative of dismissing the Imam (A) from caliphate and selection of another caliph.

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 115; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 245.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 247; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 534.

Aḥnaf immediately returned to the Imam (A), informed him of his conversation with Abū Mūsā, and reminded him that they were dispatching somebody to restore to them their rights but he was indifferent as to the Imam's dismissal. The Imam said, 'God is indeed victorious over his affair.' Aḥnaf reiterated that dispatching him for arbitration is a source of concern to them.[2]

Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and his Son, 'Umar

Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ was among those who had failed to pledge allegiance to the Imam (A), but he had not involved himself in political agitation. When the flames of the Battle of Ṣiffīn were ablaze, he settled himself in the land of Abū Salīm and looked at all times for updates as to the developments of the battle. He noticed one day that a man on horseback was approaching him. He was his son, 'Umar, the one who later took the lives of Imam Ḥusayn (A) and his followers.

The father inquired about the developments and 'Umar informed him of the imposed arbitration and the session attended by the two arbitrators at Dawmat al-Jandal. He asked his father to take advantage of his past activities in the Muslim community, reach that spot, so that he may manage to win the caliphate. The father said, 'My son! Keep calm. I heard from the Prophet that some sedition would occur after his death and the best of the people is the one who would keep a low profile and avoid involvement in it. I have never been involved in the issue of caliphate since the early days and I will never get involved in it. Even if I am supposed to get involved in it, I will do so along with 'Alī. People threatened me with their sharp swords but I preferred that over the hellfire.'[3]

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 116; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 536; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 249.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 249; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 537.

[3] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 249.

Sa'd believed that collaboration with either of the two parties would lead to sedition and finally to the hellfire. Nevertheless, he was totally in favour of 'Alī's (A) superiority over Mu'āwiyah. In his poem, which he composed on that evening and it was heard by his son, he praised 'Alī (A) and criticised Mu'āwiyah:

If I have to take an action one day,
I will follow 'Alī to gain his satisfaction.

He was so blind hearted that he believed that following the Imam – whose imamate had been clarified to everyone at Ghadīr Khumm and was such that all the Migrants and Helpers pledged allegiance to him after the assassination of 'Uthmān – was involvement in sedition. The point is that turning away from such Imam will lead to being cast into the hellfire![1]

Mu'āwiyah's Concern over the Circumstances

Some of the companions and their children who, despite being far from 'Alī (A), had not collaborated with Mu'āwiyah were called to Syria by Mu'āwiyah after the battle had come to an end. They included 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, and Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah.

Mu'āwiyah asked Mughīrah to render him assistance by informing him of the views held by the two arbitrators. He accepted the assignment and departed for Dawmat al-Jandal where he held separate meetings with them. First he asked Abū Mūsā, 'What do you think about the one who has avoided such struggle and has turned away from the bloodshed?'

Abū Mūsā replied, 'They are the best individuals! They do not carry a load of blood on their back and their stomachs are empty from illegal wealth!'

He then met with 'Amr and inquired about the same issue. He replied, 'Those who lead a secluded life are the worst people – they have neither known the truth nor have they denied falsehood.'

Mughīrah returned to Syria and said to Mu'āwiyah, 'I have asked for the opinions of both arbitrators. Abū Mūsā will dismiss 'Alī from the caliphate and will vest it in 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar who did not participate in the battle. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ is your old friend. People say that he intends to assume the caliphate and he does not consider you to be worthier than him.'[1]

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 539.

The End of the Arbitration Conspiracy

The representatives of both groups were supposed to discuss certain issues and derive their judgements from the Book and the prophetic tradition and inform the followers of the Imam (A) and Mu'āwiyah of their arbitration. Such issues included the following:

1. investigation of the factors leading to the assassination of 'Uthmān;
2. legitimacy of the Imam's (A) caliphate;
3. the reason lying behind Mu'āwiyah's opposition to the Imam's (A) legitimate caliphate and the basis for the validity of such reason;
4. safeguards for maintaining peace in the prevailing circumstances.

Nevertheless, the arbitrators did not discuss the above issues, since each of them stepped into the arena of arbitration aiming to fulfil their own wishes, as if discussing those issues was on the agenda. The Muslim community was concerned over the two arbitrators' and the supervisors' prolonged stay at Dawmat al-Jandal. The unexceptional and those hasty in judgement thought differently from the far-sighted and profound.

In discussing the first issue, it was suggested that the majority of the questionable measures of the third caliph and his officials should be investigated based on reliable evidence and the views of the companions, the Iraqis, and the Egyptians who collaborated in the assassination of the caliph should be sought and scrutinised. Further, the claims of the assassins as to the caliph's violation of the Islamic precepts and his deviation from the tradition of the Messenger of God (S) and even the first two caliphs are supposed to be judged impartially.

Nonetheless, no serious measure was taken in those respects, but, aiming to achieve his goals (dismissal of the Imam from caliphate and investiture of Mu'āwiyah or his son, 'Abd Allāh, to the caliphate), 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ said to Abū Mūsā, 'Do you admit that 'Uthmān was innocently assassinated?'

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[1] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 539; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 251; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 167.

He implied his acknowledgement of the claim, saying, 'The assassins made the caliph repent and they took his life, whereas when some wrongdoer repents, his sins will be forgiven.'[1]

No mention was made of the legitimacy of the Imam's (A) caliphate which had been imposed on 'Alī (A) by the unanimous demand of the Migrants and the Helpers, despite his reluctance; he was not eager to accept the offer and it was only following the unanimous demand of the Migrants and the Helpers and their insistence that they would not vote for anybody else that he consented to assume the responsibility. If the caliphate of the first caliph was legitimised by pledging allegiance to him by a few individuals at Saqīfah and the caliphate of the second caliph was legitimised by Abū Bakr's appointment, the Imam's (A) caliphate was undoubtedly legitimised by pledging allegiance to him by almost all the Migrants and the Helpers, except for five individuals.

The third issue was not discussed either, as both arbitrators knew that the only motive behind Mu'āwiyah's objection was dismissing the Imam (A) from his legitimate caliphate and his assuming power. Mu'āwiyah's words, deeds, and career, before and after the assassination of 'Uthmān, indicate that he had been seeking some opportunity to establish the Umayyad rule by which he would be able to rule similar to the Persian kings and the Roman emperors; 'seeking revenge for the caliph's blood' and 'punishing the assassins' were but excuses for his violating the laws and justifying his protest. Had he truly considered himself responsible for punishing the assassins, he would have, similar to other Muslims, followed the legitimate caliphate of the Imam (A) and would have asked him to take measures to punish those who perpetrated the assassination of 'Uthmān.

In the early days of Mu'āwiyah's objection, the Imam (A) recurrently showed him the manner of making claims against the opponents of the caliph and reminded him of his most significant commitment to safeguarding the unity of the Muslim community and respecting the council of the Migrants and the Helpers, a commitment that preceded putting claims, requesting the order of retaliation, and the like. Further, the Imam said that so long as Mu'āwiyah fails to recognise the legitimacy of his caliphate he would not be able to make any claims.

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[1] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 199.

As to the fourth issue, instead of condemning Mu'āwiyah's disobedience to the caliphate that was approved of by the council of the Migrants and the Helpers or lamenting his failure to support the Imam's (A) caliphate, Abū Mūsā declared that both parties had acted unjustly. In so doing he aimed to vest the caliphate in an individual who took pride in being the son of 'Umar, the second caliph, and that he had not involved himself in those disputes. Nonetheless, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar was so incompetent that his father said that his son was too incompetent to divorce his wife.[1]

The arbitrators were supposed to discuss the four issues impartially and consider the Imam's legitimate caliphate and Mu'āwiyah's disobedience to the central government in making decisions as to further issues. It was, however, so unfortunate that the Imam's (A) intellectually inept companions had imposed a representative on him who wavered between different positions in his reasoning.

From the early days of arrival in Dawmat al-Jandal, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ respected Abū Mūsā as the companion of the Prophet and asked him to talk first. When both arbitrators agreed to the dismissal of 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah, 'Amr still asked him to voice his opinion first and vote to the dismissal of his client, as it was the practice adopted by both parties during their stay at Dawmat al-Jandal.

Abū Mūsā thus voted for the dismissal of the Imam (A) and in so doing ignored his friends' instructions. In contrast, 'Amr immediately voted for the caliphate of Mu'āwiyah! Abū Mūsā's simple-mindedness and ineptness caused a great and irreparable loss. The conversation held by the two parties will be mentioned below to shed light on the consequences of the arbitration and the obstinacy of the Imam's (A) simple-minded friends that led to such damage to Islam.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ asked Abū Mūsā, 'Do you know that 'Uthmān was innocently murdered?'

Abū Mūsā said, 'Yes.'

'Amr said, 'O people! Bear witness that 'Alī's representative confessed to the innocent assassination of the caliph.' 'Amr asked Abū Mūsā, 'Why do you turn away from Mu'āwiyah, 'Uthmān's trustee, when he is from the Quraysh? If you are concerned about public protest that people would say that you voted for the caliphate of one who has no precedence in Islam, you could reply that Mu'āwiyah is the trustee of the innocent caliph, the trustee who is able to take revenge for the caliph's blood and excels others in discretion, leadership, and policy and in terms of relation to the Prophet (S) is similar to the brother-in-law of the Messenger of God (Umm Ḥabībah's brother). Besides, if he assumes caliphate he will respect you more than anybody else.'

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[1] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, Beirut, vol. 3, p. 343.

Abū Mūsā said, 'Fear God! Caliphate belongs to men of religion and virtue and if you consider family dignity as the standard of caliphate, 'Alī is the noblest of the Quraysh. I will never turn away from the early Migrants nor will I vote for Mu'āwiyah's caliphate. I will not select him as the caliph even if he resigns the caliphate in my interest. If you wish people to remember 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb we could discuss the possibility of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar's caliphate.'

'Amr asked Abū Mūsā, 'If you are interested in 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar's caliphate, why do you not vote for the caliphate of my son, 'Abd Allāh, who is not inferior in the least to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar and my son's integrity and noble qualities are known to everybody?'

Abū Mūsā replied, 'He was involved, similar to his father, in the rebellion and does not deserve to be caliph.'

'Amr said, 'Caliphate belongs to a man of determination who eats and lets others eat and the caliphate of 'Umar's son is not advisable. Now that we have not come to an agreement about those individuals, you need to make another suggestion as to which we may reach an agreement.'

The two parties held a private session in which they came to an agreement that will be mentioned below. Abū Mūsā said, 'I believe that we had better dismiss both of them [i.e. 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah] from the caliphate and vest the appointment of the caliph in a council of Muslims so that they select whoever they deem fit as the caliph.'

'Amr said, 'Quite so. We need to announce officially our verdict.'

The supervisors and the others who awaited the arbitrators' verdict assembled to hear their words. 'Amr then took advantage of Abū Mūsā's simple-mindedness and asked him to declare his opinion. Ignorant of 'Amr's failure to confirm the judgement on which they had agreed in private, Abū Mūsā said, 'I and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ agreed on a matter and we hope that the improvement of the affairs and the salvation of Muslims lie in it.'

'Amr said, 'Quite so! Please go on.'

Ibn 'Abbās warned Abū Mūsā, saying, 'If you have agreed on something, allow 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ to speak first, as he may say something different from your agreement.'

Abū Mūsā, however, ignored his admonition, saying, 'It is all right. We are in agreement as to the caliphate.'

He arose and said, 'We investigated the affairs of the people and the best solution that we came up with is to divest 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah of the caliphate and vest the selection of caliphate in a council of Muslims. Accordingly, I divest 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah of caliphate.' He thus retired and took his seat.

'Amr took Abū Mūsā's place and having praised and glorified God, he said, 'O people! You heard Abū Mūsā. He divested his Imam of his authority and I agree with him on that dismissal. I also dismiss him of caliphate, but, unlike him, I reinstate Mu'āwiyah in his office as the caliph. He is 'Uthmān's trustee, the one who seeks revenge for his blood, and the one who is more qualified than anybody else to assume caliphate.'

Abū Mūsā got into a rage and said to 'Amr, 'May you never find salvation for you were deceitful and you sinned. You are like a dog that when attacked and left alone opens its mouth and sticks out its tongue.'[1]

In reply, 'Amr said, 'You are like a donkey carrying books on its back.'[2] 'Amr's ruse was not manifest to all and the meeting was disrupted.[3] Shurayḥ ibn Hānī rose up and struck 'Amr's head with his whip. 'Amr's son rushed to help his father, whipped Shurayḥ on the head, and people separated them. Shurayḥ ibn Hānī later regretted that he had not struck him on the head with his sword rather than his whip.[4]

Ibn 'Abbās said, 'May God disgrace Abū Mūsā! I warned him against 'Amr's ruse, but he ignored my admonition.'

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[1] An allusion to Qur'an 7:176, *'So his parable is that of a dog: if you make for it, it lolls out its tongue, and if you let it alone, it lolls out its tongue.'*

[2] An allusion to Qur'an 62:5, *'The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books. Evil is the example of the people who deny God's signs, and God does not guide the wrongdoing lot.'*

[3] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 199; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 118; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 38; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 167; *Tajārib al-Salaf*, p. 48; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 408.

[4] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 40; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 168; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 546.

Abū Mūsā said, 'Quite so! Ibn 'Abbās warned me against the ruse of this disobedient man, but I trusted him and never thought of his malevolence.'[1]

Addressing both arbitrators, Sa'īd ibn Qays said, 'Even if you had maintained integrity in your arbitration you would not have improved our affairs let alone your agreement that is based on error and deviation from the path of truth. Your arbitration is not binding to us and we will resume our confrontation with the rebels in battle.'[2]

It was mainly Abū Mūsā and Ash'ath ibn Qays (who had been involved in the arbitration) who were censured. Abū Mūsā recurrently abused 'Amr verbally and Ash'ath was unable to say anything. 'Amr and Mu'āwiyah's followers finally departed for Syria, greeted Mu'āwiyah by addressing him as the caliph and provided him with a detailed report of the developments. Ibn 'Abbās and Shurayḥ ibn Hānī returned to Kufa and reported the incident. Nevertheless, Abū Mūsā, anxious of his failure, sought refuge in Mecca and settled there.[3]

The Battle of Ṣiffīn and arbitration finally came to an end in Sha'bān 38 / July 657.[4] The number of Syrian fatalities is reported as forty-five thousand or ninety thousand and that of the Iraqis is reported as twenty thousand or twenty-five thousand.[5] The battle and arbitration posed numerous challenges to the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful (A) and the Islamic caliphate, some of which were irreparable.

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 40; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 168; *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 546.

[2] *Waq'ah Ṣiffīn*, p. 547.

[3] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 200; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 118; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 168; *Tajārib al-Salaf*, p. 49.

[4] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, part 6, p. 40; al-Ṭabarī reports the date on the authority of al-Wāqidī, a date recorded by al-Mas'ūdī in *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 406) and *Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf* (p. 256). However, the correct date is Ṣafar 37 / July 657.

[5] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 404.

22

The Battle of Nahrawān

The Evil Consequence of the Ploy to Raise the Qur'an Parchments on Spearheads

The vicious and unmanly stratagem of Abū Sufyān's son and the ploy devised by his mastermind, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, led to vicious and excruciating outcomes. Aware of the vicious effects of his stratagem, 'Amr was certain of his victory in the process of arbitration. An assessment of such policy reveals that the long awaited wishes of the enemy came true. Mention may be made below of some of the outcomes of that policy.

1. Syria was now completely under Mu'āwiyah's control and all the governors and officials of that land were whole-heartedly obedient to his rule and those who were, to some extent, inclined towards 'Alī (A) for the hope of some benefit turned away from the Imam (A) and joined Mu'āwiyah's camp.
2. The Imam (A), who had been a few steps away from victory, turned to be leagues away from it. Restoring that opportunity was not easy, as the circumstances had caused a loss of morale within his army and the spirit of seeking martyrdom was not fostered among them.
3. Mu'āwiyah's army, that had been on the verge of defeat, was reorganised and reinvigorated. They resorted to plundering in Iraq to demoralise the inhabitants of that region and jeopardise their security and thereby exhibit the inefficiency of the central government.

4. Discord was sown in the Iraqi army. A faction acknowledged the arbitration and termed the other faction as disbelievers and sinners and considered it incumbent upon the Imam (A) to repent of his consent to arbitration. They threatened that they would disobey the Imam (A) and would rise against him as they had taken arms against Muʿāwiyah.
5. It was due to the view held by the opponents of arbitration who had been formerly its proponents and it was under their pressure that the Imam (A), against his own belief and volition, had voted for arbitration. It was after the Imam's (A) arrival at Kufa that they left that city as a token of their protest against the Imam's rule and assembled in a place at a distance of three kilometres from Kufa. It was even before the wounds of the Battle of Ṣiffīn had healed that the Battle of Nahrawān broke out. The insurgent faction was seemingly defeated but the remaining insurgents resorted to instigating measures against the Imam (A), as a consequence of which ʿAlī (A) fell a victim to a ploy hatched by the Khawārij and was assassinated on 19 Ramaḍān 40 / 27 January 661 while prostrating in the dawn prayer.

The Imam faced three horrendous battles that were unprecedented, in some respects, in the history of Islam.

Insurgents like Ṭalḥah and Zubayr instigated the first battle wherein the prestige of ʿĀ'ishah, the Mother of Believers, which was on a par with that of the Messenger of God (S), was jeopardised. As a consequence of their insubordination, a bloody battle broke out and they were finally defeated.

It was in the second battle that Abū Sufyān's son, Muʿāwiyah, resorted to the excuse of taking revenge for the blood of ʿUthmān. He rose against the central government and the Imam (A) elected by the Migrants and Helpers, and thus deviated from the path of truth and justice.

The Imam's (A) opponents in the third battle were his former followers whose foreheads had been calloused by their frequent prayers and prostrations and their recitation of the Qur'an reverberated. When the Imam abandoned his hope for encouraging them to tread the path of truth by delivering speeches and dispatching emissaries of influence to them and when he encountered their armed rebellion, he found no other alternative but to confront them and, as he put it, 'pull out the eyes of sedition'.

It was only the Imam (A) who dared to confront such sanctimonious people. His sacrifices in the cause of Islam, his immigration and other feats of courage in the battles fought in the lifetime of the Messenger of God (S), his unwavering piety, his knowledge and erudition, as well as his decisive reasoning in disputes afforded him the qualification to eradicate corruption decisively.

These three factions are known in the history of Islam by the names Nākithīn (the unfaithful), Qāsiṭīn (wrongdoers and those deviating from the path of truth), and Māriqīn (those in error who veered off the path of religion). These names were first employed in the lifetime of the Prophet (S) who had termed these three factions by such names and had informed 'Alī (A), among others, that he would fight these factions. The Prophet's (S) predictions as to their rebellion were among his news from the unseen world that were later recorded with respect to different events by Muslim traditionists in hadith sources. According to one of these traditions, 'The Messenger of God (S) ordered me to fight against the Nākithīn, the Qāsiṭīn, and the Māriqīn.'[1]

In his *Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH / 1373 CE) reports that the Prophet (S) entered Umm Salamah's home and 'Alī later joined him. Addressing his wife, the Prophet (S) said, 'O Umm Salamah! This is the man who will fight after me against the Nākithīn, the Qāsiṭīn, and the Māriqīn.'[2] The authenticity of the report will be vindicated by consulting hadith and historical sources; as a result, it is for the sake of brevity that reference is here given to *Ghadīr*, the voluminous work by the late erudite scholar, Amīnī, who has collected the hadith in question in its slightly different forms as well as its chains of transmission.[3]

It is reflected in historical sources that the *Māriqīn* frequently resorted to violent insurrection and disobeyed any form of government. They neither recognised any ruler nor did they obey any form government. They did not distinguish between just and unjust rulers, like 'Alī (A) and Mu'āwiyah respectively, and they treated equally Yazīd, Marwān, and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz.

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[1] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, vol. 8, p. 340.

[2] *Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, part 7, vol. 4, p. 305.

[3] *Ghadīr*, pp. 188–195, written as a critique of *Minhāj al-Sunnah*.

The Origins of the Khawārij

The roots of the Khawārij lay in the lifetime of the Messenger of God (S) when they voiced their ideology and made a display of their disobedience and aggression. For instance, it is reported that the Prophet (S) distributed the booties of the Battle of Ḥunayn as he deemed it appropriate and provided the new converts who had fought against Muslims for years with a bigger share to win their hearts. Ḥarqūṣ ibn Zuhayr, addressing the Prophet (S), objected impudently, saying, 'Be fair!' Offended by his impertinence, the Prophet (S) said to him, 'Woe unto you! If I am not being fair, where does fairness lie?' 'Umar suggested that he should be beheaded, but the Prophet declined and predicted his sad fate, saying, 'Leave him be! His followers will go to extremes in matters of religion and will rush out of the path of faith like an arrow shot from a bow.'[1]

In his *Mu'allafat al-Qulūb*, Bukhārī narrates the report in detail, saying, 'The Prophet concerning him and his companions said, "They will rush out of religion like an arrow shot from a bow."'[2] The Prophet (S) used the verb form *yamraqūna* (they pass swiftly like an arrow), since it was because of their misunderstanding of religious beliefs that they rushed from the reality of religion and were later termed by Muslims as *māriqīn* (those who rush).[3]

Ḥarqūṣ was supposed to voice aggressively his protest against the caliphate of the first two caliphs and call to question the manner of their selection and their policies, but historical sources are silent in that respect. It is only narrated in Ibn Athīr's *Kāmil* that Ḥarqūs was appointed by the caliph 'Umar as the commander of the Muslim army in the conquest of Ahwāz and the text of the caliph's letter to him following the conquest of Ahwāz and Dawraq is included in Ibn Athīr's book.[4]

According to al-Ṭabarī, it was in 35 AH / 656 CE that Ḥarqūṣ, heading the insurgents of Basra, arrived in Medina in an uprising against 'Uthmān, and collaborated with the insurgents of Egypt and Kufa against the caliph.[5] His name is not mentioned in historical sources until the Imam (A) was about to dispatch Abū Mūsā for arbitration. Ḥarqūṣ, accompanied by

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 497.

[2] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

[3] Al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh wa al-Radd*, p. 50.

[4] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 2, p. 545.

[5] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, al-A'lamī edition, vol. 3, p. 386.

Zur'ah ibn Nūḥ al-Ṭā'ī met with the Imam (A) and they engaged in heated debate with him, a summary of which will be mentioned below.

> Ḥarqūṣ said, 'Repent of your mistake and refuse the arbitration. Send us to fight against the enemy and see the divine countenance.'
>
> The Imam (A) said, 'I made mention of the issue of arbitration, but you protested against me. Now that we have concluded a treaty, you expect me to dishonour it? God says: "*Fulfil God's covenant when you pledge, and do not break [your] oaths after pledging them solemnly and having made God a witness over yourselves. Indeed, God knows what you do*" (16:91).'
>
> Ḥarqūṣ said, 'You have to repent of this sin.'
>
> The Imam (A) said, 'It was no sin, but it was to some extent some weakness in judgement and action which was imposed on me by you and I warned you of it.'
>
> Zur'ah ibn Nūḥ al-Ṭā'ī said, 'If you do not desist from supporting the arbitration, we will fight against you in the cause of God and His satisfaction.'
>
> 'Alī (A) said, 'You unfortunate man! I see your dead body in the battleground which is being covered by dust as the wind blows.'
>
> Zur'ah said, 'I would like to have such fate.'
>
> 'Alī (A) said, 'You two have been led astray by Satan.'

Ḥarqūṣ' impudent treatment of the Prophet (S) and the Commander of the Faithful (A) would be unexpected when we consider him an ordinary Muslim, but Muslim exegetes[1] consider him as one of the hypocrites and hold that he is referred to in this blessed verse of the holy Qur'an: '*There are some of them who blame you regarding [the distribution of] the charities: if they are given from them, they are pleased, but if they are not given from them, behold, they are displeased*' (9:58).

Another Origin of the Khawārij

Another instigator of the Khawārij was Dhū al-Thudayyah whose name is mentioned as Nāfi' in the sources devoted to transmission authorities (*rijāl*). He is confused with Ḥarqūṣ, known as Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah, by many traditionists, but in his *Milal wa al-Niḥal* al-Shahrastānī holds a different view: 'The first of them was Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah and the last of them was Dhū al-Thudayyah.'[1]

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[1] *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 3, p. 40.

Their identical manner of protest to the Prophet (S) in distribution of war booties and the Prophet's (S) identical reply to them[2] have led many people to confuse them and consider them as one person. Nevertheless, Dhū al-Thudayyah's depiction in historical sources and the hadiths narrated from the Prophet (S) are quite dissimilar to those about Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah. In his collection of the historical reports and traditions about the Māriqīn, Ibn Kathīr narrates from the Prophet (S) as saying, 'A faction will turn away from the religion like an arrow shot from a bow and they will never return to it. This faction will be marked by the membership of a man with dark complexion whose hand will have a deformity in that a piece of flesh, like a woman's breast, will hang from the tip of his fingers.'[3]

After his victory in the Battle of Nahrawān, Imam 'Alī (A) ordered his men to find Dhū al-Thudayyah's dead body in the battlefield and examine his deformed hand. His hand was exactly as described by the Messenger of God (S).

Ideological Schools of the Khawārij

The Khawārij first rose against the Imam (A) on the issue of arbitration which they regarded against the Book of God. It was in the passage of time that another factor came into play as the issue turned into an ideological school and it branched off into schools other than the Muḥakkimah (those calling for divine judgement), such as the Azāriqah, Najadāt, Bayhasiyyah, 'Ajāridah, Tha'ālibah, Ibāḍiyyah, and Ṣufariyyah. The relatively moderate Ibāḍiyyah denomination, the followers of 'Abd Allāh Ibāḍ who rose up in the later period of Marwanid rule, turned out to be the only surviving Khārijī offshoot that now reside on the banks of the Oman Sea, the Persian Gulf, and in the Maghrib regions in North Africa, like present-day Algeria.

The history of the Khawārij, besides the Battle of Nahrawān, has been of interest to Muslim historians, some of whom have collected the historical reports about the Khawārij, among whom mention may be made of al-Ṭabarī in *Ta'rīkh*, al-Mubarrad in *Kāmil*, and al-Balādhurī in *Ansāb*. Further, numerous analytical studies have been authored by later Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, some of which are the following:

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[1] *Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 1, p. 116; nevertheless, on page 115 he confuses them, saying, 'Ḥarqūṣ ibn Zuhayr, known as Dhū al-Thudayyah'.

[2] Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, Ḥalabī's edition, vol. 3, p. 919.

[3] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, vol. 2, p. 496.

Muḥammad Sharīf Salīm, *Mulakhkhaṣ Ta'rīkh al-Khawārij* (An Abridged History of the Khawārij), Cairo 1342 / 1923.

'Umar Abū al-Naṣr, *Khawārij fī al-Islām* (The Khawārij in Islam), Beirut 1949.

'Alī Khaṭīb Hāshimī, *Waq'ah al-Nahrawān* (The Battle of Nahrawān), Tehran 1423 / 2002.

Nāyif Maḥmūd Ma'rūf, *Khawārij fī al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* (*The Khawārij under the Umayyads*), 2nd ed., Beirut 1401 / 1980.

Orientalists have been interested in them and have authored books on them, among whom mention may be made of the following:

Julius Wellhausen, *Die Religiös-Politischen Oppositionsparteien im Alten Islam*, 1901 (*Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*), translated from the German into Arabic by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Cairo 1968.

Suhayr Qalmāwī's MA dissertation, *Adab al-Khawārij fī al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* (The Khawārij Literature under the Umayyads) which he prepared in the 1930s and published in 1940, in which he discussed the compositions of some of their poets like 'Imrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān.

In his analysis of the history of the Khawārij, the present author has used authoritative Islamic sources in pursuit of an analytical assessment of the history of Islam, yet he has never felt needless of the aforementioned sources.

The Disgraceful Measures taken by the Khawārij

The term Khawārij (lit. 'seceders') is frequently used in theology and history. In Arabic it is applied to insurgents rising against a government which they do not regard as legitimate. As a theological and historical term, it is applied to a faction of 'Alī's military forces who broke away from the Imam (A) because of the Imam's (A) recognition of the arbitration treaty by shouting the slogan 'Judgement only belongs to God', as a result of which they are termed in heresiographical sources (*al-milal wa al-niḥal*) as Muḥakkimah (lit. those calling for divine judgement).

The Imam (A) deemed it advisable, following the conclusion of the arbitration treaty, to leave the battlefield in Ṣiffīn for Kufa and await the arbitration decision to be declared by Abū Mūsā and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ. Upon his return to Kufa, the Imam (A) encountered dissention in his army when he and his self-sacrificing companions noticed that a battalion of twelve thousand men refused to enter Kufa. In their protest against the recognition of the arbitration, some of them departed for the village of Ḥarūrā' and some others settled in the camp of Nukhaylah.

The arbitration, used by the Khawārij as an excuse for their insubordination, had been their own demand when they raised the leaves of the Qur'an on spearheads, pressured the Imam (A) to consent to it, and even threatened to take his life for refusal to do likewise. It was because of their misperception and unfounded excuses that they changed their course and regarded the process of arbitration as a sin and even as disbelief. They repented of it and called the Imam (A) to confess to his sin, repent of it, and lead another campaign against Muʿāwiyah before the declaration of the arbitration verdict.

However, ʿAlī (A) never consented to wrongdoing or to illegitimate measures nor did he dishonour any treaty. The Imam (A) disregarded the obstinate faction and resumed his normal life in Kufa, but they left no stone unturned to achieve their goals. Some of their actions were as follows:

1. they held private meetings with the Imam (A) to persuade him to violate the treaty;
2. they failed to participate in congregational prayers;
3. shouting abusive slogans at mosques against ʿAlī (A);
4. declaring as disbelievers ʿAlī and whoever honoured the treaty concluded at Ṣiffīn;
5. assassination of figures and causing unrest in Iraq;
6. armed rebellion against the Imam's (A) caliphate.

The Imam (A) tried to calm down the situation by taking measures some of which were as follows.

Clarification of his position at Ṣiffīn as to the issue of arbitration and the fact that he first objected to it and he was coerced to recognise the arbitration treaty.

1. Responding to the questions raised by the Khawārij by delivering speeches and following sound lines of reasoning.
2. Dispatching emissaries like Ibn ʿAbbās to provide them with guidance.
3. Promising them that if they remain silent while still holding their views they will not be treated differently to other Muslims. He thus kept on paying their shares from the public treasury.
4. Persecution of the criminal Khawārij who had shed the blood of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Khabbāb and his pregnant wife.
5. Confronting their armed rebellion and eradicating corruption.

These topics will be treated below. Fortunately, the precise dates of such incidents and events have been recorded in historical sources and they will be dealt with in our ensuing discussion.

1. Holding Private Meetings

In a meeting with the Imam (A), two chiefs of the Khawārij, Zurʿah al-Ṭāʾī and Ḥarqūṣ engaged themselves in a heated debate with him. Zurʿah and Ḥarqūṣ said, 'Judgement belongs only to God.'

The Imam (A) said, 'I am saying the same.'

Ḥarqūṣ said, 'Repent for your mistake, turn away from the arbitration, and dispatch us to battle with Muʿāwiyah that we see the countenance of our Lord.'

The Imam (A) said, 'I did not consent to arbitration but you rebelled against me and coerced me to recognise the arbitration. Now that we have consented to certain conditions and concluded a treaty with them, we cannot dishonour it. God says: *"Fulfil God's covenant when you pledge, and do not break* [*your*] *oaths after pledging them solemnly and having made God a witness over yourselves. Indeed, God knows what you do"* (16:91).'

Ḥarqūṣ said, 'It is incumbent on you to repent of this sin.'

The Imam (A) said, 'It was not a sin but an instance of weak judgement [caused by your coercion] and I had informed you of this and had dissuaded you from making such demand.'

Zurʿah said, 'By God! If you fail to deny the arbitration of men as to the Book of God, I will fight you to gain divine satisfaction!'

The Imam (A) said angrily, 'You unfortunate, vicious man! I see that you will be slain before long and wind will blow on your dead body.'

Zur'ah said, 'I wish that this come true.'

The Imam (A) said, 'You have been robbed of your reason by Satan. Fear divine chastisement! There is no gain in this world for which you may wage battle.' They both left as they were shouting the slogan 'Judgement belongs only to God.'[1]

2. Voicing Protest by Refusing to Perform Congregational Prayers

It is meritorious to perform congregational prayers and failure to participate in them is not regarded as a sin; however, it was different in early Islam in that not frequently participating in them would imply protesting against the government and a token of hypocrisy. As a result, numerous traditions have been narrated as to emphasising the performance of congregational prayers. However, it is for the sake of brevity that such traditions will not be included here.[2]

The Khawārij would come to the mosque and voice their protest by refusing to perform congregational prayers and shouting abusive slogans. Once, when the Imam (A) was performing prayers, Ibn Kawwā', a chief of the Khawārij, voiced his protest by reciting this verse: '*Certainly it has been revealed to you and to those [who have been] before you: "If you ascribe a partner to God your works shall fail and you shall surely be among the losers*"' (39:65). The Imam (A) became silent with utmost gravity, in accordance with the principle expressed in the verse, '*When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and be silent, maybe you will receive [God's] mercy*' (7:204); until Ibn Kawwā' was finished with the recitation of the verse, then he resumed his prayer.

The Khārijī chief recited the verse once again and the Imam became silent. He repeated his recitation and the Imam (A) was silent most patiently. Finally, the Imam (A) recited the verse: '*So, be patient! God's promise is indeed true. And do not let yourself be upset by those who have no conviction*' (30:60) whereby he performed his prayer and made Ibn

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 53.

[2] *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 5, book on congregational prayer, ch. 1, p. 370.

Kawwā' silent.[1] By his frequent recitation of that verse Ibn Kawwā' most impudently intended to declare as a disbeliever the man who was the first believer in Islam after the Prophet (S), under the pretext that he consented to the arbitration of men rather than God. The question of divine judgement will be discussed below in detail.

3. Shouting the Slogan 'Judgement belongs only to God'

The Khawārij frequently declared the establishment of their faction and protested against the Imam's (A) caliphate by chanting the slogan 'Judgement belongs only to God' at the mosque and elsewhere. The slogan is derived from the following Qur'anic verses:

> *Judgement belongs only to God; He expounds the truth and He is the best of judges.* (6:57)
>
> *Look! All judgement belongs to Him, and He is the swiftest of reckoners.* (6:62)
>
> *Judgement belongs only to God. He has commanded you to worship none except Him.* (12:40)
>
> *Judgement belongs only to God. In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust* (12:67).
>
> *All praise belongs to Him in this world and the hereafter. All judgement belongs to Him, and to Him you will be brought back.* (28:70)
>
> *...But if partners were ascribed to Him you would believe. So, the judgement belongs to God, the Most Exalted, the Most Great* (40:12).

According to these verses of the holy Qur'an, the judgement indubitably and exclusively belongs to God and ascribing it to others is considered as polytheism. Nevertheless, it is specified in another verse: '*Certainly We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgement, and prophethood*' (45:16). In another verse, God commands the Prophet to judge justly: '*So, judge between them by what God has sent down, and do not follow their desires*' (5:48). God Almighty commands the Prophet David to judge justly among people: '*So, judge between people with justice, and do not follow desire*' (38:26).

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 54; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 269.

It was so unfortunate that the Imam (A) had to deal with ignorant people who took advantage of the outward aspects of the verses and thus deceived people and led them astray. The Khawārij were reciters and memorisers of the Qur'an, but in the words of the Prophet (S): 'The Qur'an did not penetrate their throats and breasts as it did not affect their thought.' They never thought of learning the meaning of the divine verses from the Imam (A) or his trusted companions who were the exegetes par excellence of the holy Qur'an and whereby learning the meaning intended by 'Judgement only belongs to God'.

As mentioned above, '*ḥukm*' (judgement), as a polysemous term, has the following meanings:

1. dispensation of the affairs of the world of creation and the divine will that prevails in it (12:67);
2. legislation and law-making (6:57);
3. sovereignty over people as a true and original right (12:40);
4. judgement and arbitration in the disputes among people according to divine precepts (5:49);
5. serving as the guardian and guide of people and the bearer of divine trust (45:16).

Considering that *ḥukm* is a polysemous term, one cannot make reference to the outward aspect of a verse and protest against the process of arbitration at Ṣiffīn. Now, the kind of judgement which only belongs to God needs to be clarified, the Imam's (A) stance must be scrutinised, and its conformity or non-conformity to the Qur'an should be determined. Such a task requires patience, discretion, and reflection, but chanting slogans and causing chaos may never lead to the appreciation of the different senses of the term and making distinction between them.

The Imam (A) exercised patience so delicately, as it was his practice, and he tried in his reasoning to introduce to them the accurate meanings of the verses. However, the fact is that there is no remedy for obstinacy and even the prophets and reformers of the world failed to find a cure for such an ailment. Now, we report some of the offensive behaviours of the Khawārij to exhibit their obstinacy and then we proceed with an analysis of the said verses.

The Imam's (A) Noble Qualities of Patience and Forbearance

Any powerful leader would have chastised such impudent and unmannerly people who charged him of polytheism and disbelief, but the Imam (A), contrary to the usual practice of people in power, treated them with the utmost patience and forbearance.

The Imam (A) was once giving a speech to the people and provided them with wise advice when one of the Khawārij shouted from a corner of the mosque, 'Judgement only belongs to God'. He was succeeded by others who chanted the same slogan. The Imam (A) thus responded to them, 'What they are saying is outwardly true, but they seek falsehood. You enjoy three rights so long as you are with us [and your impertinence will not deprive you of these rights]: [a] you will not be deprived of entering mosques to perform prayers; [b] you will not be deprived of your shares of the public treasury so long as you are with us [and have not joined the enemy]; [c] we will not fight against you unless you have initiated the battle.'[1]

The Imam (A) was delivering a speech at the mosque another day when a Khārijī attracted the attention of people by chanting slogans. The Imam (A) said, 'God is the Greatest. This word is true, but some untrue meaning is intended by it. If they remain silent, they will be treated like others, but if they speak, we will respond to them and if they rebel, we will fight against them.'

Another Khārijī by the name of Yazīd ibn 'Āṣim al-Muḥāribī arose and having glorified God he said, 'I seek refuge in God from consenting to humiliation in the religion of God. Such transgression is on a par with resorting to deception in the divine judgement and such disgrace that will entail divine wrath. 'Alī, are you threatening to take our lives?' The Imam (A) did not respond to him, but awaited the occurrence of the incidents in store for them.[2]

The Imam's (A) Enlightening Endeavours

The insubordination of some of the forces which helped to strengthen the Imam's (A) authority caused a more intense situation. There were two instances of insurrection, once at Ṣiffīn where the insurgents pressured him to stop the battle and consent to the arbitration or lose his life. The other instance occurred after the conclusion of the treaty and recognition of the arbitration by the Khawārij who later made a contrary demand – to dishonour the treaty.

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 53.

[2] Ibid.

The first demand changed the course of the battle which was leading to the Imam's victory, but consenting to the conclusion of the peace treaty, considering his simple-minded forces that were unwilling to battle and were even prepared to assassinate him, was neither illegitimate nor foolish. He thus addressed the chiefs of the Khawārij, 'Recognition of the judgement of the arbitrators was imposed on me through the pressures of some of my supporters and weakness in judgement and not through acting upon my own discretion.'[1]

However, the latter demand was contrary to the Qur'anic precept of calling everyone to honour treaties and covenants. The Imam (A) thus had no alternative but to exercise fortitude and steadfastness and provide the deceived with guidance or else make attempts to disperse them. He began with providing them with guidance, but when such measure proved futile, he, considering the circumstances, adopted other ways like dispatching his erudite companions, known for their knowledge of the Book of God and the prophetic tradition, to the camp of the Khawārij.

Ibn 'Abbās and his Reasoning with the Khawārij

Ibn 'Abbās was dispatched by the Imam (A) to the camp of the Khawārij. He asked them, 'What do you say? What are the faults that you find with the Commander of the Faithful?'

They said, 'He used to be the Commander of the Faithful, but he became a disbeliever when he submitted to arbitration. He has to confess to his disbelief and repent of it and we will support him again.'

Ibn 'Abbās said, 'A Muslim is not supposed to confess to his disbelief unless he is certain that he has doubted the fundamentals of the Islamic faith.'

They said, 'He is a disbeliever because he submitted to arbitration.'

Ibn 'Abbās said, 'Consenting to arbitration is a Qur'anic precept an instance of which is this verse: "*Do not kill any game when you are in*

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[1] It was not a sin, but it ensued from weakness in judgement and action; see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 53.

sanctuary [*of Mecca*]. *Should any of you kill it intentionally, its atonement, the likeness from cattle of what he has killed, as judged by two fair men among you, will be an offering brought to the Ka'bah, or an atonement by feeding needy persons, or its equivalent in fasting, that he may taste the untoward consequences of his conduct*" (5:95). God Almighty commands Muslims to consent to arbitration in a simple matter like hunting in the sanctuary; how can Muslims turn a blind eye to arbitration in the matter of imamate?'

They said, 'The judgement of the arbitrators was against his view and he did not consent to their judgement.'

Ibn 'Abbās said, 'The Imam is not outranked by an arbitrator. Even if the leader of the Muslim community deviates from the path of truth the *ummah* are supposed to rise against him, not judge arbitration as unjust.'

Feeling that they were being rebuked for holding such views, the Khawārij persisted in their obstinacy and thus criticised Ibn 'Abbās, 'You are from the tribe of Quraysh about whom God says: "*...rather they are a contentious lot*" (43:58); "*...and warn with it a disputatious lot*" (19:97).' Had they been seeking the truth and had they not been entangled with blind hearts and despotic views, they would have welcomed Ibn 'Abbās' sound line of reasoning and would have joined the Imam (A) in fighting the enemy instead of taking arms against him. It was so unfortunate that in response to the Imam's (A) cousin they recited verses from the Qur'an that had been revealed about the polytheists of the Quraysh rather than their believers.

Seeking arbitration is even recommended in the holy Qur'an as to less significant disputes, like family issues, and it is said that when the two parties have good intentions it will have favourable results. It is reflected, for instance, in this verse: '*And if you fear a split between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his relatives and an arbiter from her relatives. If they desire reconciliation, God shall reconcile them. Indeed, God is all-knowing, all-aware*' (4:35).

It would not stand to reason to say that the disputes that lasted for three months ensuing from a devastating battle were less significant than family issues. It was not disbelief that the *ummah* sought the judgement of two arbitrators, one from each party, in the light of the Book and the prophetic tradition and they are not supposed to repent of it.[1]

A consideration of the mentioned verses shows that condemnation of arbitration by the Khawārij stemmed but from their obstinacy and authoritarian inclination. On the Imam's (A) orders, Ibn 'Abbās undoubtedly tried to reason with them more than once, since he made references to the verses of the Qur'an in the reported debate, but the Imam (A) had asked him to reason with them by making references to the prophetic tradition, as the verses of the Qur'an could be interpreted differently by them. The Imam (A) said to him, 'Do not make references to the Qur'an in your reasoning with them, since the verses may be variously interpreted and your debate will prove futile. Make use of the prophetic tradition in your reasoning and thereby leave no room for their refusal.'[2]

The Imam (A) Visits the Camp of the Khawārij

Disappointed after having dispatched emissaries to them – like Ṣa'ṣa'ah ibn Ṣawḥān al-'Abdī, Ziyād ibn Naḍr al-Ḥārithī, and Ibn 'Abbās – the Imam (A) made up his mind to hold a conversation with the Khawārij and thus dissuade all or some of them from insurrection by clarification of the background and motives of consenting to the selection of the arbitrators and the fact that they were insisting on their arbitration. Upon his departure, the Imam (A) inquired about the Khārijī chief followed by the insurgent group. It was said to him, 'Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arḥabī.'[3]

The Imam (A) mounted his horse, passed through the camp, dismounted in front of Yazīd's tent, and established a two-*rak'ah* prayer. He then leant on his bow and thus addressed the Khawārij, 'Were you all fighting at Ṣiffīn?'

They said, 'No.'

He said, 'Form two groups that I speak to each group as is befitting of them.'

He then said in a loud voice, 'Be silent! Stop the hubbub! Give me your ears! When I ask you to bear witness, reply to the best of your knowledge.'

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[1] Reference will be made below to the verse about family issues in the Imam's (A) arguments.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 77.

[3] A Khārijī chief from the tribe of Yashkur ibn Wā'il.

Before resuming his speech, he thus invoked God, 'O Lord! This is the place where anyone who achieves success will succeed on the Day of Resurrection and anyone who is condemned here will lose his sight and will be led astray in the hereafter.'

Addressing the Khārijī group, he said, 'Did you not say, when deceitfully raising the Qur'an parchments on spearheads that they were our brethren and co-religionists and they repented of their past deeds and sought refuge in the Book of God and their opinions should be accepted and their sorrows should be removed? Did I not reply to you by saying that the proposal was outwardly stemming from faith and inwardly ensuing from enmity and vengeance? Did I not say to you that it would begin compassionately and agreeably but it would end in remorse? Stay where you are. Do not turn away from your path. Fight the enemy in the cause of God. Do not pay heed to anybody's shouts, as if you support him you will be led astray by him and if you leave him he will suffer humility. I was finally coerced to consent to the selection of arbitrators and you accorded such opportunity to the enemy.'[1]

In his commentary on Sermon 36 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says, the Khawārij said to him that what he said was the truth, but they had committed a grave sin and they had repented of it and he had to do likewise. The Imam (A) did not make mention of any specific sin, but said, 'I seek divine forgiveness for all sins.' It was at that time that six thousand men joined him from the camp of the Khawārij as the Helpers of the Imam. In his commentary on this invocation to God to forgive sins, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says, 'The Imam's repentance was a kind of equivocation (*tawriyah*) and an instance of "war lies in devising stratagems" (*al-ḥarbu khud'atun*). The like of his blunt sayings had been uttered by all prophets. The enemy was satisfied with it, though the Imam did not confess to having committed any sin.'[2]

The Malice of a False Friend who was but an Enemy at Heart

It was following the return of the Khawārij from the camp to Kufa that it was rumoured that the Imam (A) had turned his back on arbitration, he had regarded it as an instance of error, and he was making arrangements to persuade people to fight against Mu'āwiyah before the declaration of the arbitrators' judgement.

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 280.

[2] Ibid.

Ash'ath ibn Qays, a suspicious individual among the followers of the Imam (A), and a supporter of Mu'āwiyah at heart, put on a friendly mask and said, 'People are saying that the Commander of the Faithful has changed his mind as to the arbitration. He believes that it is an instance of disbelief and error and he disapproves of awaiting the arbitrators' judgement.'

The Imam (A) had to clarify the truth, saying, 'Those who believe that I disapprove of the arbitration treaty are telling untruths and those who consider it as an instance of error have been led astray.' The Khawārij were so upset by the Imam's (A) clarification of truth that they shouted the slogan 'Judgement only belongs to God' as they left the mosque for their camp.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd specifies that Ash'ath left no stone unturned to subvert the Imam's caliphate, since had he not raised the question, the Imam would not have been forced to clarify the truth and the Khawārij would have been content with his invoking God for forgiving all the sins and they would have fought against Mu'āwiyah on the Imam's side. The Imam (A) was forced to unveil the half-truth and shed light on the full truth.

Further Attempts at Providing the Khawārij with Guidance

In his *Kāmil*, al-Mubarrad reports a debate different from the previous one. It could be a second debate with the Khawārij. The summary of the debate is as follows.

The Imam (A) asked the Khawārij, 'Do you recall that when pages of the Qur'an were raised on spearheads I said that it was a deceitful plan and had they sought the arbitration of the Qur'an they would have sought my arbitration? Do you know anybody who considers the judgement of the two arbitrators more abhorrent than me?'

They replied, 'No.'

He asked, 'Do you bear witness to my utmost unwillingness to consent to the arbitration and the fact that you forced me into consenting to it and I said that the arbitrators' judgement would be in effect provided that they considered the divine judgement? You all agree that the divine judgement far surpasses my judgement and that I am the true imam and the caliph elected by the Migrants and the Helpers?'

'Abd Allāh ibn Kawwā' said, 'You are right in saying that we insisted on your approval of the selection of the two arbitrators to issue a judgement according to the religion of God, but we confess that we became disbelievers by it and now we repent of it and you need to confess to your disbelief, repent of it, and dispatch all your forces to battle against Mu'āwiyah.'

The Imam (A) asked, 'Do you know that God commands that the judgement of two arbitrators be sought in family issues, as it is reflected in the verse: '*And if you fear a split between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his relatives and an arbiter from her relatives. If they desire reconciliation, God shall reconcile them*' (4:35)? In specifying the atonement for hunting in a state of pilgrimage the Qur'an says that the arbitration of two just men needs to be sought, as it is reflected in the verse: "*Do not kill any game when you are in the sanctuary* [*of Mecca*]. *Should any of you kill it intentionally, its atonement, the likeness from cattle of what he has killed, as judged by two fair men among you, will be an offering brought to the Ka'bah, or an atonement by feeding needy persons, or its equivalent in fasting, that he may taste the untoward consequences of his conduct*" (5:95)?'

Ibn Kawwā' said, 'You had the title the "Commander of the Faithful" omitted following your name and you thus divested yourself of caliphate.'

The Imam (A) said, 'We follow the Prophet as our model. It was in the Battle of Ḥudaybiyyah that a peace treaty used to read: "This is the treaty written by Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, and Suhayl ibn 'Amr" but the Qurayshī emissary objected by saying, "Had I acknowledged your divine apostleship I would not have been your opponent. You need to omit the title the 'Messenger of God' following your name." The Prophet said to me, "'Alī, erase the title the 'Messenger of God' following my name." I said to him, "O Messenger of God, my heart does not allow me to do so." The Prophet then erased it by his own hand and smilingly said to me, "You will have the same fate."'

When the Imam (A) completed his reply, two thousand men who had assembled at Ḥarūrā'[1] returned to the Imam (A) and it is for their assembly at Ḥarūrā' that they have been designated as the Ḥarūriyyah.[2]

Another Debate

The stance adopted by the Imam (A) on the Khawārij was that they were free to settle in Kufa and its adjacent regions so long as they neither shed blood nor plundered people's possessions, even though their shouts reverberated at the mosque and they chanted slogans against him. The Imam (A) once again dispatched Ibn 'Abbās to the village of Ḥarūrā'. He asked the Khawārij, 'What are your demands?'

They replied, 'All the people who were at Ṣiffīn and agreed to arbitration should leave Kufa. We need to stay at Ṣiffīn for three evenings and repent of our misdeed. Then, we should depart for Syria to battle against Mu'āwiyah!'

Such a proposal shows their obstinacy and lack of wisdom. Even if arbitration had been sinful there would have been no need to repent of it by staying three evenings where it had been committed! The fact is that one may repent of one's sin by feeling deep regret for one single moment and invoking God for forgiveness.

In response, the Imam (A) asked them, 'Why are you raising this question when the two arbitrators have been selected and dispatched and both parties have agreed to such arbitration?'

They replied, 'The battle had dragged too long at that time, the hardships were on the increase, there were too many casualties, and we had lost most of our weapons and mounts. That was why we consented to the arbitration.'

The Imam (A) asked, 'Did you consent to it when hardships were on the increase? The Prophet (S) honoured his treaty with the polytheists, but you expect me to dishonour my covenant?'

The Khawārij were deeply ashamed but they still insisted on their erroneous belief. They entered one after the other, shouting the slogan,

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[1] A village in the vicinity of Kufa.

[2] Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, p. 45; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 274–275.

'Judgement only belongs to God "though the polytheists should be averse" (9:33; 61:9).'

A Khārijī entered a mosque one day and shouted the slogan. He was encircled by people and he chanted his slogan differently this time as, 'Judgement only belongs to God though Abū al-Ḥasan [i.e. 'Alī (A)] should be averse.'

In response to him the Imam (A) said, 'I am never averse to divine judgement, but I await the divine judgement on you.'

People asked the Imam (A), 'Why do you grant them such respite and freedom? Why do you not eradicate them?'

He replied, 'They shall never be eradicated. Some of them are in the loins of their fathers and in the wombs of their mothers and they shall remain as such until the Day of Resurrection.'[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 310–311.

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An Analysis of the Motives of the Khawārij for Disobedience

The motives behind the disobedience of the Khawārij to the Imam (A) were different from Mu'āwiyah's opposition to him. It was under 'Umar that Mu'āwiyah had paved the ground for the autonomy of Syria and considered himself as the absolute ruler of that land. After the assassination of 'Uthmān, Mu'āwiyah noticed that the Imam (A) intended to divest him of the governorship of Syria. He thus rose against the Imam (A) by instigating Ṭalḥah and Zubayr to disobey the Imam (A) and also by initiating the Battle of Ṣiffīn. He sowed discord in the last days of the battle by having leaves of the Qur'an raised on spearheads, a vicious ploy whereby he dealt a severe blow to the Imam (A).

The Khawārij were a miserly faction that clung to a superficial reading of the Qur'an and it was their superficiality and ignorance of true Islamic principles and values that they rose against the Imam (A). They resorted to unfounded excuses in arraying their forces against the divine light and made attempts at extinguishing its splendour and thereby trod the path to perdition.

It was because of such differences between Mu'āwiyah and the Khawārij that having gained victory over them the Imam (A) said, 'Do not fight against the Khawārij after me, since those who seek the truth but deviate from its path are not equal to those who seek falsehood and achieve it.'

An analysis of the motives behind the disobedience of the Khawārij reveals that this faction, unlike the Syrians, did not seek worldly gains, but they were dominated by their peculiar intellectual backwardness and deviation from the straight path. Mention will be made below of their main objections.

1. Sovereignty of Individuals over Religion

The Khawārij ever protested that two individuals from two opposing groups were not supposed to make decisions based on their own personal preferences and thereby affect the fate of the Muslim community and override the judgement of the leader of the Muslims. They held that the religion and fate of the Muslims should not be subject to deficient human reason. They persisted in chanting the slogan 'men arbitrate as to the religion of God' intending to say that 'Alī appointed them to serve as arbitrators in matters of religion.

Such an objection exhibits that they were unaware of the conditions governing the arbitrators' judgement and thought that the Imam (A) had given them a free hand to make decisions about the fate of the Muslim community. In response to this objection, the Imam (A) said, 'We made the Qur'an, rather than any individual, the arbitrator; however, the Qur'an is a book between two covers, in that it does not speak of its own, but somebody is supposed to speak for it and there are specific individuals who are qualified to do so. The Syrians demanded our selection of the Qur'an as our arbitrator and we were not inattentive to the Book of God. God Almighty says: "*And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you have faith in God and the Last Day*" (4:59). Referring to God means to refer to the Qur'an and referring to the messenger means to refer to his tradition. We are the worthiest of the people in arbitration based on the Book of God as well as the prophetic tradition."[1]

In another sermon, the Imam (A) reiterates the same response in different words, saying, 'Two arbitrators were selected to reinvigorate what has been invigorated by the Qur'an and to wipe out what the Qur'an has wiped out [i.e. to reinvigorate the truth and to wipe out falsehood]. Invigorating the Qur'an lies in agreement to its precepts and wiping out the Qur'an is to turn away from it. If the Qur'an leads us towards the Syrians we will have to follow it and if it leads them towards us they will have to follow us. I have neither led you to any evil nor have I deceived you nor have I treated you hypocritically."[1]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 121.

2. Setting a Deadline

They objected to setting a deadline for the arbitrators in that they were required to stay at a neutral spot (Dawmat al-Jandal) to the end of the month of Ramaḍān to issue their judgement on the differences between the two parties. Another objection of theirs was that the arbitration session had to be held at Ṣiffīn where the Qur'an parchments were raised on spearheads! Their sheer ignorance is well reflected in such criticisms. How could arbitration between the two parties at war be convincingly completed in a day or two? Could exercising patience lead to awakening the ignorant, strengthening the position of the knowledgeable, and preparation of the path of the *ummah* towards peace?

In response to this objection the Imam (A) said, 'As to my setting some deadline for you and them and avoiding haste in arbitration, I intended to awaken the ignorant and strengthen the position of the knowledgeable that God may improve the affairs of the *ummah* within that period of time.'[2]

3. Contradiction between Human Arbitration and Restriction of Divine Arbitration

In their opposition to the Imam (A), the Khawārij emphasised the slogan 'Judgement only belongs to God' and regarded the Imam's (A) deed as contrary to the Qur'an In their slogans they said, "Alī, judgement only belongs to God not to you or your companions.' As mentioned above, their slogan was taken from verses like 12:40 and 12:67 and the contents of these verses are among the fundamental principles of monotheism according to which judgement and sovereignty are reserved for God and no man has such right over another.

Nevertheless, the fact that judgement only belongs to God stands in contradiction to the rule of certain individuals who act upon specified precepts, the most significant of which is divine permission (*idhn*), and they thereby make manifest the principle of divine sovereignty. It goes without saying that a society cannot survive without a governing body, since carrying out obligations and finding solutions to issues may only materialise in the light of governance.

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[1] Ibid., Sermons 17 & 121.

[2] Ibid., Sermon 121.

Having heard their slogan, the Imam (A) said that their words were true in that sovereignty belongs to God, but some false goal was pursued by this truth. He added, 'Yes, sovereignty belongs to God (and no servant of God may rule without divine leave), but the Khawārij pursue another goal by chanting their slogan – they hold that the society should not be subject to a governing body (with or without divine permission), whereas there should be a ruler, beneficent or maleficent, to rule so that believers can carry out their good deeds and disbelievers be able to benefit from a favourable means of life in this world.

'Lack of government will entail insecurity in society wherein neither believers may carry out good deeds nor disbelievers benefit from this worldly life. Granted that no governance is needed in society, how may we justify the governance of the Prophet (S) and the first two caliphs (*shaykhayn*)?'

The Khawārij were not unanimous in their beliefs and deeds. They knew, on the one hand, that living in society cannot materialise without an efficient leader; on the other hand, their misunderstanding led them to oppose the establishment of any form of government as contrary to divine absolute sovereignty.

It is a source of amazement that they chose a chief to lead their faction in their early days. According to al-Ṭabarī, a group of the Khawārij assembled at the home of 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī.[1] In his speech, 'Abd Allāh said, 'It is not right that some people believe in God and obey the precepts of the Qur'an and they prefer worldly life over enjoining good and forbidding wrong.' He was followed by Ḥarqūṣ ibn Zuhayr and Ḥamzah ibn Sinān. Ḥamzah closed his speech by saying, 'Vest your affairs in a man whom you have to trust to give him the helm and refer to him in your affairs.'[2]

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[1] The date is recorded as March 658 in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, p. 54b. [Translator]

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 55.

Arbitration: The Last Hope

Complex issues had been raised before and after the Battle of Ṣiffīn. A solution to such issues was to select arbitrators to investigate them realistically and issue judgements on them. Those issues include the following:

1. the assassination of 'Uthmān;
2. accusing the Imam's (A) companions of assassinating the caliph;
3. Mu'āwiyah claimed that he was the next of kin to 'Uthmān and he could forgive the assassins or have them executed for retaliation.

These issues were the main factors leading to the outbreak of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. There were two solutions to these issues. First, both parties to the dispute could discuss the issues with the Imam (A) who had been elected by the Migrants and the Helpers, and he was able to arbitrate between them based on divine judgement. The Imam (A) had emphasised this solution before the Battle of Ṣiffīn. In his letter to Mu'āwiyah, the Imam (A) wrote: 'You talked in detail about the murderers of 'Uthmān. I call you to pledge allegiance to me, similar to others, and file your grievance and I will call everyone to the Book of God.'[1]

This solution was off limits due to Mu'āwiyah's obstinacy and his thirst for the governorship of Syria which ultimately brought about the Battle of Ṣiffīn...

The other solution lay in referring both parties to a competent court wherein impartial and realistic arbitrators could suggest a solution to the issues; arbitrators who could consider the best interests of Islam and Muslims and who had no hand in profiteering (as with 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ) nor vengeance (as with Abū Mūsā). The Imam (A) could achieve his real goal in such court and the issues could be raised and solutions could be found to them.

The assassination of the caliph 'Uthmān was not a complicated issue, as the motives behind it were clear and dissatisfaction had been growing in time until the intensity of pressure, strangulation, battering of the righteous, and torturing the beneficent people ultimately brought about the incident, an incident which could not be hindered by 'Alī (A) and the caliph's life could not be saved by him. The claim made by Mu'āwiyah and those clenching to the caliphate of 'Uthmān had to be put forward to a competent court where truth and untruth could be distinguished. It is completely unwise to lead a military campaign in order to take revenge on an individual's blood, let alone causing the loss of lives of about sixty-five thousand people.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 64.

Had the arbitration held at Dawmat al-Jandal administered justice, such issues could have been investigated in it and thereby the obligation of the Muslims with respect to such incidents could have been clarified. It was most unfortunate that the factors leading to disputes were not put forward there. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ intended to deceive his counterpart, Abū Mūsā, and have him divest the Imam (A) of caliphate and thus manage to declare Mu'āwiyah as the caliph. Abū Mūsā intended to vest the caliphate in 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar who shared his views, claiming that the latter hand no hand in causing the fatalities incurred by either party! 'Alī (A) did not recognise the judgement issued at the arbitration, stating that the arbitrators had violated their obligations. He decided to reorganise his army, but the insurrection staged by the Khawārij impeded him from leading a campaign against Mu'āwiyah.

Eradication of Corruption

The Imam (A) adopted a conciliatory policy in his treatment of the Khawārij and he only made attempts at providing them with wise advice and admonition. He treated them like a father intending to guide his disobedient children. He paid their share of the public treasury and ignored their chanting slogans at the mosque and elsewhere.

He endeavoured to calm down that faction and restore unity to the society and eradicate the malignant tumour of Syria from which stemmed that insurgent faction. The latter attempt was stipulated in the arbitration treaty according to which in case the two arbitrators issued judgements contrary to the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, the Imam would pursue his former stance.[1]

The Imam (A) delivered a series of speeches in order to enlighten the people that resuming battle against Mu'āwiyah would not be in contradiction to the treaty concluded at Ṣiffīn, but it was according to the treaty that the battles should resume to deal a final blow to the enemy. In one of his speeches, he said, 'This condition was stipulated in the treaty in that they [the two arbitrators] would be obliged to judge based on justice and truth and both of them had acknowledged our condition prior to their unjust arbitration. Now, we see that they have deviated from the path of truth and have issued an unjust judgement. We are on the side of truth and it is incumbent on us to resume our battle to suppress the insurgence.'[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 234.

The Imam (A) and his companions strove to uproot 'the bad tree'[2] and pull out the tumour of corruption. He invested all his efforts to achieve these goals. The course of events altered drastically and suddenly and instead of resuming battle against Mu'āwiyah, fateful and sporadic confrontation with the Khawārij was in store. Now, let us see what made the Imam (A) desist from exercising forbearance and what led him to confront that insurgent group. The factors leading to the confrontation may be summarised as below.

1. It was reported that the Khawārij had assembled at the home of 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī and they had made up their mind to stage an armed uprising under the pretext of enjoining good and forbidding wrong. They thus communicated a message to their like-minded supporters in Basra and called them to join as soon as possible the camp of the Khawārij at Khaybar in the vicinity of Nahrawān and the Khawārij of Basra had also announced their readiness to do likewise.[3]
2. The judgement issued by the arbitration session held at Dawmat al-Jandal, according to which the Imam (A) had been most impertinently divested of his office to be succeed by Mu'āwiyah, made the Imam (A) enlighten the public as to that issue. He thus ascended a pulpit in Kufa and, having glorified God, he said, 'Opposition to a knowing and benevolent man will entail remorse. I had been averse to the arbitration of these two arbitrators but you failed to accept my view and consented to their arbitration. Neglecting their obligations they reinvigorated what had been wiped out by the Qur'an and wiped out what had been reinvigorated by the Book of God. They pursued their own desires and produced unfounded arguments. Neither of the arbitrators is supported by God, His prophet, and the believers. Be prepared to proceed towards Syria to battle and assemble at Nukhaylah

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Sermon 172.

[2] An allusion to *shajarah khabīthah*, see Qur'an 14:26. The vicious disbelievers are intended by this term. [Translator]

[3] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 132.

on Monday. By God! I will battle against that group [i.e. the Syrians] even if single-handedly.'

3. The Imam (A) made up his mind to depart Kufa for Ṣiffīn as soon as possible. It was suggested by some of his companions that it would be a good idea to call the Khawārij to fight on the side of the Imam (A). He communicated a message to the chiefs of the Khawārij and said to them, "Amr ibn al-'Āṣ and Abū Mūsā have erred. They have opposed the Book of God and have pursued their own desires. They have neither acted upon the prophetic tradition nor upon the Qur'an. They are divested of the support of God, His prophet, and the believers. Upon the receipt of my letter hasten to join me in fighting against our enemy.'
4. The Khawārij were not effected in the least by the Imam's (A) message. They declined his call; as a consequence, the Imam (A) lost his hope in them and did not expect them to join him. He believed that he could depart for Ṣiffīn with his forces or those whom he could gather. He thus wrote a letter to Ibn 'Abbās, the governor of Basra, and asked for assistance. Upon the receipt of the letter, he informed the people of its contents, but it was most unfortunate that only fifteen hundred men, led by Akhnaf ibn Qays, welcomed their Imam's (A) call.

Heavy hearted at the small number of volunteers, he gave a speech to a large audience, saying, 'I have received a message from the Commander of the Faithful in which he has commanded me to dispatch forces to join him in battle. I issued an order to that effect, but only fifteen hundred men have been volunteered, whereas the number of men recorded in the official register stands at sixty thousand. Depart as soon as possible and avoid producing excuses. Those who decline their Imam's call shall be filled with remorse. I ordered Abū al-Aswad to make preparations for your departure.'

Notwithstanding the endeavours made by Abū al-Aswad and others, only 1,800 men joined the first group and an army of 3,200 men departed for Kufa.

Saddened by the limited number of the Basran forces, the Imam (A) rose up to give a speech to Kufans, saying, 'O people of Kufa! You are my brethren and supporters in the cause of truth. It is by your support that I will deal a blow to those who turn their back against the truth. I hope that you guard the truth steadfastly. Behold that only 3,200 Basran forces have joined us. It is incumbent on you to render me assistance most sincerely and the chiefs should call their tribes and clans to dispatch able-bodied men to fight on our side.'

Tribal chiefs like Sa'd ibn Qays al-Hamdānī, 'Adī ibn Ḥātim, and Ḥujr ibn 'Adī most willingly sent messages to their tribes and forty thousand warriors, seventeen thousand young men, and eight thousand slaves were thus sent to Kufa to join the Basran forces. A considerable number of forces were thus prepared to battle against the enemy most bravely on the side of the Imam (A).

There were some people who insisted on dealing a final blow to the Khawārij before confronting Mu'āwiyah. The Imam (A) declined their suggestion, saying, 'Leave them be. Confront those who favour the power of tyrannical rulers and enslaving the believers.' The forces under his command unanimously declared that they would battle against whoever was deemed appropriate by him as their hearts were similar to one single heart, beating eagerly for their victory over the enemy.

5. It was reported at those critical moments that the Khawārij had beheaded 'Abd Allāh Khabbāb by a river and they had even slain his wife, ripped out her baby from her womb and cut off its head. In his *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, Ibn Qutaybah thus reports the incident,

> Encountering 'Abd Allāh, the Khawārij asked him, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'A believing servant of God.' They asked, 'What is your opinion about 'Alī?' He replied, 'He is the Commander of the Faithful and the man who believes in God and His messenger.'
>
> They asked, 'Was your father a companion of the Prophet?'
>
> He said, 'Yes.'
>
> They asked, 'Did we upset you?'
>
> He said, 'Yes.'
>
> They said, 'Narrate to us the hadith that you heard from your father and he had heard it from the Prophet.'
>
> He said, 'My father narrated from the Prophet (S) as saying, 'Sedition will occur after me as a consequence of which the believer's heart will die; he will go to bed a believer in the evening and will wake up a disbeliever in the morning.'

> They said, 'We intended to hear this hadith from you. By God! We will take your life unprecedentedly.'

They tied up his hands and feet and carried him and his pregnant wife to a palm tree. A date fell from the tree and a Khārijī put it in his mouth. His friends burst into protest against eating it without having gained the owner's consent or having paid for it. The man took out the date and threw it away! A pig belonging to a Christian was shot by a Khārijī. His like-minded companions protested against it by calling it corruption in the land and sought the satisfaction of the owner of that animal!

They took 'Abd Allāh to the river, beheaded him, slew his wife, ripped out her womb, and cut off the head of the foetus. They also took the lives of three other women, one of whom was a companion by the name of Umm Sinān.[1]

Khabbāb ibn Aratt, 'Abd Allāh's father, was an early convert to Islam and the marks of the tortures he had suffered at the hands of the Quraysh were visible on his body to his last days. He had passed away in Kufa before the Imam's (A) return from Ṣiffīn. The Imam visited his tomb and praised his noble qualities.

In his *Kāmil*, al-Mubarrad reports the heart-rending murder of 'Abd Allāh and says that when the murderer was arrested, he said, 'I call you to reinvigorate what the Qur'an has reinvigorated and wipe out what it has wiped out.' He also reports the hadith which 'Abd Allāh had narrated on the authority of his father and then recounts that the Khawārij suggested to the owner of a palm tree to accept the price of a date, but the owner said that he would give it to them for free. However, they declined and insisted on paying for the date. The Christian shouted that they felt no remorse for shedding the blood of a Muslim but they declined the gift of the owner of a date.[2]

6. Informed of 'Abd Allāh's sad fate, the Commander of the Faithful (A) dispatched Ḥārith ibn Murrah to the Khawārij camp to prepare an accurate report. Upon his arrival at the camp, Ḥārith was murdered against Islamic and humane principles and values. The Imam (A) was deeply grieved by the murder of his emissary at the hands of the Khawārij. A group of the Imam's (A) supporters visited him, asking,

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[1] Ibid., p. 136.

[2] Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, p. 560; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 282.

'Do you deem it appropriate that we ignore such risk, leave our families here, and depart for Syria?'

The Decision to Punish those who murdered 'Abd Allāh

The shock waves sent by 'Abd Allāh's appalling murder urged the Imam (A) to take measures to uproot ignorance and cruelty. He was about to depart for Ḥarūrā' or Nahrawān when a companion of his who was well-versed in astrology tried to dissuade him from departing at that time, saying, 'If you depart at this time of the day, a great affliction will be in store for you.'

The Imam (A) did not heed his foretelling and criticised the use of astrology in such grave matters, saying, 'The stars must be used in finding one's way in deserts at night and in the sea.'

The Imam (A) gained a great victory on that journey. Having covered a short distance from Kufa, a companion of his rushed towards him, saying, 'O Commander of the Faithful! I bear you glad tidings that a group of the Khawārij had been notified of your departure. They fled and crossed the river.'

The Imam (A) asked him, 'Did you see that they crossed the river?'

He said, 'Yes, I did.'

The Imam (A) asked him three times to swear by God that he had seen the Khawārij crossing the river and he did. The Imam said, 'By God! They did not cross the river and they will never do so as they will lose their lives on the banks of the river. By God who split the seed and created man, they will not reach the region of Athlāth and the Castle of Bawāzin.'

That companion's words were confirmed by two others, but the Imam (A) did not accept their report either. How could he accept their report whereas the infallible Prophet (S) had told him that he would battle against three groups? He had confronted three groups, but the third group, considering the Prophet's (S) words, were the group mentioned by the Prophet (S). There was a man who was in two minds as to whether to accept the reports of the individuals who had claimed to offer first hand evidence or acknowledge the reports of the Imam (A) which were based on his knowledge of the unseen. He thought that he would join the Imam's (A) enemies had the latter's words proved untrue.

The Imam (A) mounted his horse and was followed by his forces. When they reached the camp they noticed that they had shattered the scabbards of their swords, had abandoned their horses, and were all prepared for engagement. The simple-minded young man reached the Imam (A) and asked for forgiveness for his doubts.

It is attested in historical sources that the Imam (A) passed by Madā'in, dismounted in Nahrawān, and conveyed a message to the Khawārij, asking for the surrender of the murderers who had taken the lives of 'Abd Allāh and his wife and unborn baby. They sent a message to the effect that all of them had taken their lives as they had regarded it lawful to shed his blood.

The Imam (A) approached them, saying, 'O rebellious group! I warn you against being cursed by the *ummah* and being killed without sound evidence by the river...I advised you against consenting to the arbitration and said to you that the Umayyads were neither Muslims nor did they seek to consult the Qur'an. I have known them from an early age. They were the worst children and they are the worst adults, but you did not heed my advice and disagreed with me. It was for this day that I made a covenant with both arbitrators to reinvigorate what the Qur'an invigorated and wipe out what the Qur'an wiped out. Now that they have issued a judgement contrary to both [i.e. the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition], we still take our former course.'[1]

In response to the Imam's (A) sound reasoning, the Khawārij simply resorted to their oft-repeated baseless words and insisted that all of them had lost their beliefs as a consequence of the arbitration and had repented of their disbelief. They asked the Imam (A) to bear witness to his disbelief and repent of it so that they would render him support; otherwise they preferred to be left alone. If the Imam (A) was intent on fighting the enemy [and he would repent of his disbelief], they would battle on his side. The Imam (A) asked, 'Do you expect me to testify to my disbelief despite my belief and fighting on the side of the Prophet (S)? Are you carrying your swords on your shoulders and are you shedding blood because of the arbitration? "*This is manifest loss*" (22:11; 39:15).'

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 36.

The Final Warning

Having lost his hope in negotiating with them, the Imam (A) reorganised his army. The commanders of the right and left flanks were vested in Ḥujr ibn 'Adī and Shibth ibn Rib'ī; the command of the cavalry was entrusted to Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī; and Abū Qatādah was appointed as the commander of the infantry. Eight hundred companions of the Prophet, commanded by Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah, fought for a while on the side of the Imam (A). The Imam (A) assumed the leadership of the central brigade.

The Imam (A) had a standard of amnesty raised at the cavalry and ordered Abū Ayyūb to announce that a way of return would be left open; the repentance of those who encircle that standard will be granted and those who enter Kufa or leave the insurgents would also be forgiven; the Imam's (A) forces would not shed their blood. A number of the forces from the opposing party gathered around the standard and the Imam (A) granted them amnesty.[1]

It is reported that a thousand men from the Khawārij encircled the banner. Some of their chiefs were Mis'ar ibn Fadakī, 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭā'ī, Abū Maryam al-Sa'dī, Ashras ibn 'Awf, and Sālim ibn Rabī'ah. The only chief who stayed with the Khawārij was 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī.[2]

It is reported by Ṭabarī that after that group joined the Imam (A), there were 2,800 men in the Khawārij army;[3] however, the number is reported by Ibn Athīr as 1,800.

The Imam (A) ordered his followers to avoid initiating engagement. A man rushed out of the Khawārij ranks and slew three men from the Imam's forces. The Imam (A) then commenced the battle by taking the life of the assailant. Turning to his men, he said, 'By God, You shall lose only ten men and the lives of only ten men from the enemy ranks will be spared.'[4]

'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī stepped into the battleground, saying, 'O son of Abū Ṭālib! I shall never leave you alone until I take your life or you take mine.'

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[1] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 210.

[2] *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. 1, p. 210.

[3] Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 346; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 64.

[4] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 272–273.

The Imam (A) replied, 'May God take his life. What impertinence! He knows that I am a companion of my sword and spear. He has lost his hope in life and has fostered false pride.' He then took 'Abd Allāh's life with a single strike.[1]

The Imam (A) gained victory after a while. The warriors fighting on his side charged from the right and left flanks towards the enemy and the Imam (A) attacked from the central brigade and the ground was covered before long with the corpses of the Khawārij. There were only nine forces of the Khawārij who survived; two of them sought refuge in Khurāsān, two in Oman, two in Yemen, two in Iraq, and one in Tall al-Mawzan. The Khawārij are their forerunners.[2]

Standing among the corpses of the Khawārij fallen in battle, the Imam (A) said in grief, 'Woe unto you! You incurred a great loss by the one who deceived you.' He was inquired about the person who deceived them. He said, 'They were led astray by Satan and a number of disobedient individuals. They were misled by desires and the paths to disobedience were opened to them. They were promised victory and finally they were cast into blazing hellfire.'[3]

The Imam's (A) companions used to believe that the Khawārij had been wiped out, but the Imam said to them, 'No, they survive in the loins of men and the wombs of women. When some branch of them grows it will be cut off [i.e. by rulers, but only to regrow elsewhere] and they will finally turn into plunderers and looters.'[4] He then added, 'Do not fight the Khawārij after me, as your arch-enemy is Mu'āwiyah and I battled against them simply to maintain security. It will not suffice to fight their survivors.'

The war booty, including weapons and quadrupeds, were distributed by the Imam (A) among his men and the slaves and other possessions were returned to the heirs of the Khawārij. He stood before his men, and appreciated their effort, and ordered them to depart for Ṣiffīn and uproot corruption. In response, they said, 'Our arms are too weary, our swords have been shattered, and we have run out of arrows. It would be better to return to Kufa and gather more men.' Saddened by their insistence, the Imam (A) returned with them to the camp at Nukhaylah, near Kufa. The

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[1] *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, p. 138.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorism 315.

[3] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 267.

[4] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 59.

Imam's (A) men went to visit their families and only a small number of them remained at the camp. The remaining forces were too insufficient to battle with the Syrians.

When the insurgence of the Khawārij came to an end

The Khawārij first instigated their insurgence against the Imam (A) at Ṣiffīn in Ṣafar 38 / July 657 and their opposition to arbitration based on the Book of God grew more intense in time. The Khawārij of Kufa assembled on 10 Shawwāl / 11 March 658 at the home of ʻAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī and pledged allegiance to him. They departed Kufa for Ḥarūrā' and then proceeded towards Nahrawān. On his way to Syria the Imam (A) made changes to his schedule and had to confront the Khawārij. It is reported in historical sources that corruption was uprooted on 9 Ṣafar 38 / 17 July 657.[1]

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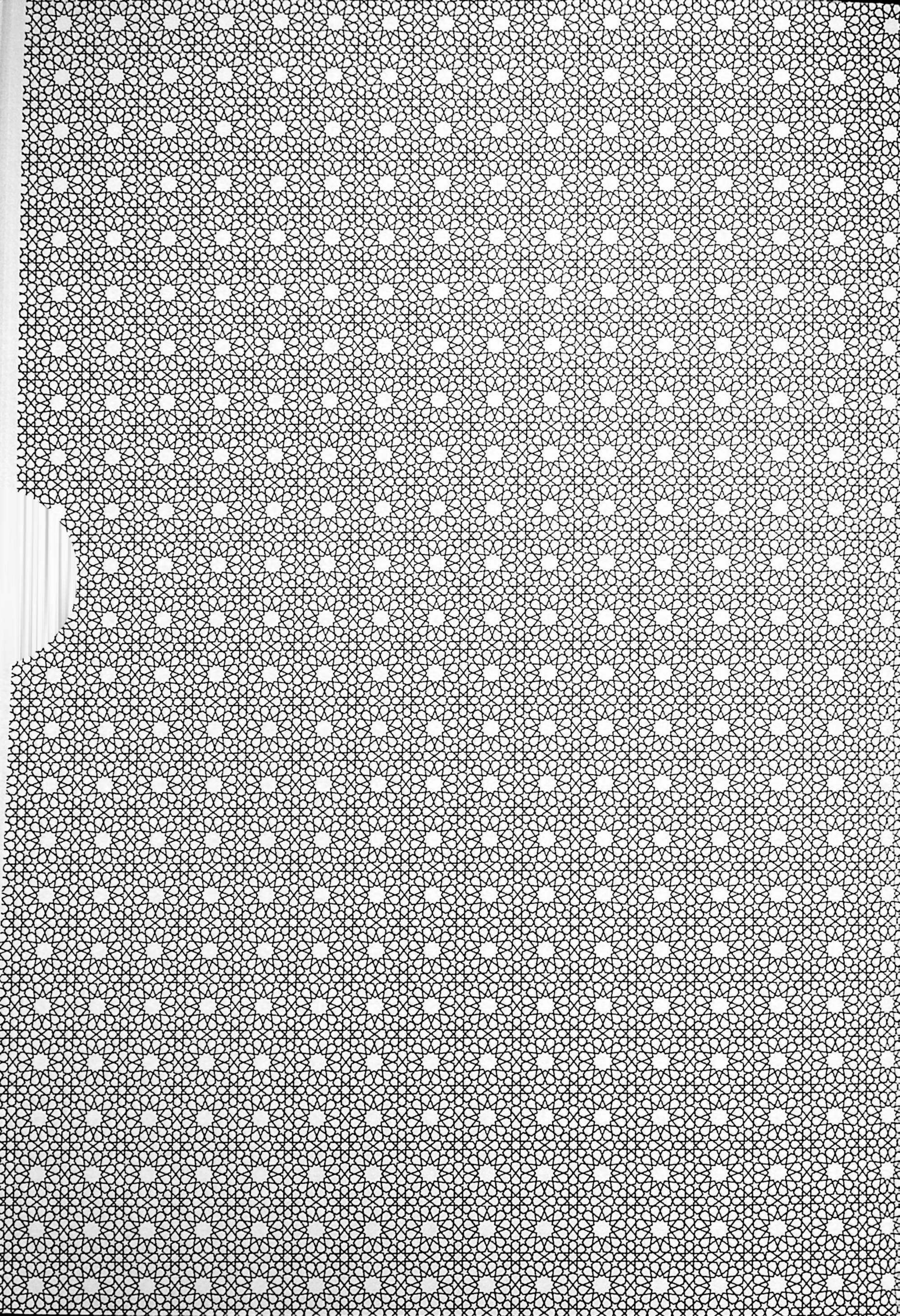
[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, p. 98.

Part 6

The Aftermath of Nahrawān and the Martyrdom of Imam ʿAlī (A)



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Plundering, Causing Insecurity, and Slaughter

The Battle of Nahrawān came to an end by the Imam's (A) decisive measures and the endeavours of his faithful followers. Now, it was the time that the Imam dismissed the disobedient from his forces and restore peace to Muslim lands and put an end to the egotism of Mu'āwiyah and the deceived Syrians, since the son of Abū Sufyān was to blame for all seditions and rabble rousing. Mu'āwiyah's fifth column frequently provided their master with intelligence. 'Ammārah ibn 'Uqbah, Walīd ibn 'Utbah's brother, was an infiltrator who entertained hatred against 'Alī (A). Those two vicious Umayyad brothers hated the Imam for his severe blows to the Umayyad household. Walīd's father had been slain by 'Alī (A) in the Battle of Badr.

Reference is made to Walīd in the holy Qur'an (49:6) as 'a profligate person'. He was whipped under 'Uthmān by the Imam (A) for drinking. It is thus not a source of wonder that his brother 'Ammārah gathered intelligence for Mu'āwiyah in Kufa and Walīd encouraged Mu'āwiyah to confront 'Alī (A) in an all-out war. In a letter, 'Ammārah revealed the discord among 'Alī's (A) followers and provided a report on the Battle of Nahrawān in which he informed his master that a number of the Qur'an reciters had been slain by 'Alī (A) and his followers, an incident that had led to disagreement and discord among them. He sent the message via a traveller departing for Syria. Having read the message, Mu'āwiyah appreciated the efforts of the two brothers, one of whom was present there.[1]

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 114–115, quoted in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*.

Muʿāwiyah had noticed that the ground had been paved for insecurity, pillage, and murdering the followers of the Imam (A). He thus dispatched his mercenaries to Hejaz, Yemen, and Iraq to resort to psychological warfare, instigate disorder, slaughtering innocent people, and looting the possessions of women and the miserable, aiming to impede the Imam (A) from reconquering Syria and thus prove that the central government was unable to protect its borders.

His vicious measures proved successful. Muʿāwiyah dispatched cruel mercenaries to ʿAlī's (A) territories and had thousands of people massacred. The invading insurgents did not spare children and women and, as will be mentioned below, two small children of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās were slaughtered in public.

These pages of the history of the Imam's (A) caliphate are extremely horrendous. Such horrifying incidents do not imply that ʿAlī (A) lacked political competence and prudence in defeating the enemy, but the fact is that he could not achieve his exalted goals because of the interventions of some of his companions who were simple-minded, meddlesome, irresponsible, and pleasure-seeking. Full reports on such appallingly savage and brutal invasions have been recorded in historical sources. Such brutalities will be vividly depicted below to shed light on Muʿāwiyah's irresponsible attitude towards Islamic principles and values.

1. The Plundering Perpetrated by Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays

Muʿāwiyah was informed of the Commander of the Faithful's (A) departure for Syria to resume battle against the Syrians. He communicated a message to that effect and dispatched his men to all the regions of Syria to inform the public of his message. A group of Syrians were about to depart for Iraq when a man by the name of Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah thus addressed them, 'Do not proceed beyond Ṣiffīn as it was in that spot that we gained victory over the enemy.' Nevertheless, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ suggested that Muʿāwiyah should lead his army to the innermost parts of Iraq in order to boost the morale of the Syrian troops and to humble the Iraqis.

His suggestion was welcomed by Muʿāwiyah but the latter said that the Syrians were not prepared to penetrate beyond Ṣiffīn. The dispute on the positioning of the troops was still dragging on when they were informed of a fierce engagement between the Imam's (A) forces and the Khawārij and that the Imam had overcome the insurgent forces in his army and had encouraged the people to proceed towards Syria but they asked for some respite. Another message arrived from 'Ammārah ibn 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'īṭ in which mention had been made of discord among 'Alī's (A) followers and the Qur'an reciters, the parsimonious people in his army had risen against the Imam (A), and disagreement was still dominating despite suppressing the insurrection.

Mu'āwiyah dispatched Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī to Kufa to lead three to four thousand men to plunder the tribes in support of the Imam (A) such that the plunderers enter a town in the morning and loot another in the evening in a hit-and-run manner to avoid engagement with the Imam's (A) forces.

On his way, Ḍaḥḥāk reached the village of Tha'labiyyah which lay on the route of Iraqis on pilgrimage to Mecca. He plundered the pilgrims' possessions, confronted 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd en route, and slew him and a number of people. Informed of Ḍaḥḥāk's plundering and slaughter, the Imam (A) ascended the pulpit and thus addressed the people, 'O people! Hasten in joining the righteous servant of God, 'Amr ibn 'Umays. Render aid to a group of your supporters who have received a blow by the enemy. Proceed to battle against your enemy and protect your borders from the penetration of enemy ranks.'

Noticing that the people had not been affected by his words, the Imam (A) said, 'By God! I would exchange ten men of you for one man from among Mu'āwiyah's supporters! Woe unto you that you leave me in the midst of the battlefield and turn your back to the enemy. By God! I do not dislike death with sound judgement as I find great peace in it and deliverance from you and the troubles that you make.'[1]

The Imam (A) descended the pulpit and departed for the region of Gharībīn. He appointed Ḥujr ibn 'Adī as the commander of four thousand men and provided him with a standard. Ḥujr departed and reached Samāwah. Searching for Ḍaḥḥāk, he finally found him in Tadmur. A battle broke out between the two forces and the enemy lost nineteen men. Two men from the followers of 'Alī (A) were martyred. Ḍaḥḥāk fled at night and on his flight from Iraq he lost the camel that carried his water supply. He found his way to some nearby village and quenched his thirst.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 97.

In a sermon the Imam (A) makes references to Ḍaḥḥāk's plundering, 'O people who have assembled physically but entertain a variety of desires! Your words soften hard rocks but your deeds entice the enemy to advance on you. You talk boastfully in vain but in the face of some upcoming battle you wish that it were warded off...What homes will you protect when you have failed to impede the enemy's advance? What leader and trustee will fight after me? By God! The deceived one is he whom you have deceived. He who does something through you will be, by God, desperate. He who shoots an arrow through you will have shot a broken arrow with no head...' The Imam (A) closes his sermon by these questions: 'The Syrians are similar to you. Are words not stemming from belief well-founded? What about neglecting obedience to God in impiety? Do you aspire to achieve some falsehood?'[1]

Informed of Ḍaḥḥāk's unmanly raids, 'Aqīl, the Imam's (A) brother, wrote a letter of sympathy to him from Mecca and requested that he and his children be allowed by the Imam (A) to depart for Iraq to share the ups and down facing him as he did not intend to survive his brother. In his response, considered as one of his most notable, the Imam (A) thus depicted his own mistreatment by the Qurayshīs, saying, 'Now the Arabs have collaborated to fight against your brother, as they had collaborated to fight the Messenger of God. They denied the right of your brother, ignored his superiority, turned towards his enemies, turned a blind eye to the endeavours that he had made in the harshest moments under the Prophet (S), and led forces from confederate tribes against him.'[2]

It is reflected in the Imam's (A) words that he considered his battle against Mu'āwiyah as a continuation of the Prophet's (S) confrontation with Abū Sufyān. The Battle of Aḥzāb (Confederates) was actually resumed at Ṣiffīn in the guise of taking vengeance for 'Uthmān's blood.

2. Dispatching Busr to Hejaz and Yemen

The Imam (A) vested the administration of a region in Yemen in 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abbās and appointed Sa'īd ibn Namrān as the governor of another region, Jand. There were people in the central regions of Yemen who followed 'Uthmān and his followers, disfavoured 'Alī's (A) caliphate, and were always involved in instigating insurrection and unrest. Informed of the Khawārij insurrection and the discord in 'Alī's (A) forces, they rose against 'Alī (A) and even expelled Sa'īd ibn Namrān from Jand. There were also people who did not follow 'Uthmān's views yet they supported the insurrectionists to evade paying taxes.

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[1] Ibid., Sermon 29; al-Thaqafī, *Ghārāt*, vol. 2, p. 416; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 104; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 111–125.

[2] Al-Thaqafī, *Ghārāt*, vol. 2, p. 431.

The insubordination was reported to the Imam (A) by Sa'īd ibn Namrān and 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abbās. The Imam (A) consulted Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arḥabī, a Yemeni figure, in Kufa and wrote a letter to the insurgents to encourage them with wise counsel and admonition to obey the central government. The Imam (A) dispatched a Yemeni from the tribe of Hamdān to send the message and the messenger read his letter to a large audience. The letter was quite instructive and effective, but the opponents said that they would obey the central government on the condition that the Imam (A) would dismiss 'Ubayd Allāh and Sa'īd from their positions.

The insurrectionists, on the other hand, seized the opportunity to write a letter with some poems to Mu'āwiyah, requesting him to dispatch an emissary to Sana'a and Jand to whom they could pledge allegiance; and should any delay occur in dispatching the emissary, they would have no other choice but to swear allegiance to 'Alī and his advisor, Yazīd al-Arḥabī.

Having received the letter, Mu'āwiyah resolved to resort to a policy of causing insecurity, insurrection, and slaughter in Hejaz and Yemen. He thus summoned Busr ibn Arṭāh, a most cruel commander of his army, and ordered him, 'Lead an army of three thousand men to Hejaz and Medina and when you meet the followers of 'Alī on your way, abuse them verbally and call them to pledge allegiance to me. Spare those who pledge allegiance and shed the blood of those who decline the allegiance. Slay the followers of 'Alī wherever you find them.'

Mu'āwiyah pursued such policy from Syria but avoided any confrontation in person with 'Alī. He thus enjoyed the outcomes of direct engagement. He considered as unwise individuals like Walīd ibn 'Uqbah who suggested a direct military engagement with 'Alī and believed that they lacked sufficient political experience. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd offers an acute analysis of the situation. He writes, Walīd was most furious with the Imam, since his father had lost his life in the Battle of Badr at the hand of the Imam and he had been whipped by him under 'Uthmān for drinking. He ruled Kufa for long and now considered 'Alī (A) as his rival and he was naturally considering confrontation with 'Alī.

Mu'āwiyah, unlike Walīd, was far-sighted as he had confronted the Imam in the Battle of Ṣiffīn and had learned that he would have never had a narrow escape from 'Alī (A) had he not resorted to the vicious ploy of raising Qur'an parchments on spearheads. He was also aware that a second engagement could lead to defeat and his death. He thus believed that it was to his advantage to cause fear and insecurity in 'Alī's territory, destabilise his rule, and demonstrate his incompetence in the administration of affairs in Muslim lands.[1]

Busr's Advance on Hejaz and Medina

Busr departed Syria with three thousand men. Four hundred men of his forces died of illness at Dayr Marwān and he advanced on Hejaz with 2,600 men. He seized camels in any village on his way to ride them to the next village, where he and his forces abandoned them to seize the camels of that village. They thus traversed a long way to reach Medina. It was upon his arrival at Medina that Busr began abusing the people verbally. He touched upon the assassination of 'Uthmān, saying, 'All of you either had a hand in his assassination or you humiliated yourselves by adopting a neutral position. By God! I will do something to soothe the hearts of his household.'

He proceeded with menacing them; as a consequence of which people sought refuge at the home of Ḥuwayṭib ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā, Busr's stepfather, who interceded with his stepson to calm him. Ḥuwayṭib called everyone to swear allegiance to Mu'āwiyah and some people did. However, he was not content with their allegiance and resorted to setting on fire the homes of anti-Mu'āwiyah dignitaries of Medina or those collaborating with 'Alī (A) in Iraq. The homes of Zurārah ibn Ḥarūn, Rifā'ah ibn Rāfi', and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī were thus set on fire. He then summoned the chiefs of Banū Maslamah and asked them, 'Where is Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh? Bring him here or prepare yourselves for death.'

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[1] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, p. 8.

Jābir had sought refuge in the home of Umm Salamah, the wife of the Messenger of God. When asked by Umm Salamah, Jābir said, 'If I do not pledge allegiance, I will be killed and if I pledge allegiance, I will have sworn allegiance to error and untruth.' It is reported in *Ghārāt* that Jābir ultimately pledged allegiance to Busr at the suggestion of Umm Salamah.

Having fulfilled his mission in Medina, he departed for Mecca and it was a source of wonder that he appointed Abū Hurayrah as his successor. He resorted to slaughter and plundering on his way from Medina to Mecca. When Busr reached the vicinity of Mecca, Qutham ibn 'Abbās, the Imam's (A) governor, left the city. Busr followed the same path by abusing the people verbally upon his arrival at Mecca and called everyone to swear allegiance to Mu'āwiyah and warned them against declining his call, saying, 'If I hear of your objection to Mu'āwiyah, I will uproot you, devastate your homes, and plunder your possessions.'

Busr, after a while, departed Mecca for Ṭā'if and dispatched a man, leading a group, to Tubālah, as he had been informed that its inhabitants were followers of 'Alī (A). He ordered his men to slaughter immediately all the people of that town.

Busr's emissary reached Tubālah and led away all the people in chains. He was asked by a man by the name of Manī' to bring a promise of amnesty from Busr. He welcomed Manī''s request and dispatched him to Ṭā'if but Busr delayed issuing the amnesty until such time that no inhabitant of that town would survive the slaughter. Manī' finally returned to his town when all the people had been led out of the town to be slaughtered. A man was about to be beheaded but the executioner's sword cracked.

The troops called each other to unsheathe their swords and wield them under the sun to keep them from cracking. Manī' saw the flashes of the blades from afar and waved his shirt to call upon them to cease the execution. The Syrians said, 'That man is bearing glad tidings. Hold on.' He showed the amnesty to the commander and thus saved the lives of the remaining people. Manī' was amazed to hear that his brother was about to be beheaded but his execution was delayed due to the cracking of the executioner's sword.

Following the accomplishment of his mission, Busr departed Ṭā'if and Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, the prominent man of Arab politics, saw him off. On his route, Busr reached the land of Banū Kinānah in Yemen and heard that 'Ubayd Allāh's two small children and their mother resided there. 'Ubayd Allāh, the Imam's (A) governor, had entrusted a man from Banū Kinānah to take care of his family. The man came to the Syrians with his unsheathed sword.

Busr said to him, 'May your mother mourn for you! We did not intend to take your life but we were after 'Ubayd Allāh's children.'

The man replied, 'I am prepared to lose my life for those whose protection has been entrusted to me.' He charged headlong at the enemy and lost his life. 'Ubayd Allāh's small children were brought forward and were slain most ferociously.

A woman from Banū Kinānah said in a loud voice, 'You take the life of men, what have the children done to you? By God! Children's lives have been spared before and after Islam. By God! The government established on the slaughter of old people and children is a weak one.'

Busr said, 'By God! I intended to slay women as well.'

The woman said in his response, 'I pray to God that you do not spare our lives.'

Busr left Kinānah. On his way, he found in Najrān 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Madān, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abbās' son-in-law,[1] took his life, and thus addressed the people, 'O people of Najrān! O Christians! By God! If you do anything against my satisfaction, I will return to take your lives and devastate your farms and homes.'

On his way to Sana'a he found Abū Karib, a follower of 'Alī (A) and a chief of the Hamdān tribe, and took his life. The Imam's (A) commanders, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abbās and Sa'īd ibn Namrān, had departed the city, entrusting the affairs to 'Amr al-Thaqafī who resisted against Busr for a while but finally lost his life.

The ruthless Busr entered the city and killed a number of people and even put to the sword all but one of the delegates from Ma'rib. The man who had escaped the slaughter returned to Ma'rib and said, 'I warn young and old that slaughter is in store for them.'

Busr left Sana'a for Jayshān whose inhabitants were all followers of 'Alī (A). A fatal engagement occurred between them and Busr. They were vanquished and captivated after incurring casualties and were ruthlessly martyred. He returned to Sana'a and put one hundred inhabitants to the sword under the pretext that a woman of that city had sheltered a descendant of 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abbās.

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[1] Possibly 'Ubayd Allāh's father-in-law. See *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, vol. 7, pp. 71–75; *Ta'rīkh al-Khulafā'*, pp. 364–366. [Translator]

Mention was only made of some of the cruelties of Busr ibn Arṭāh which have been recorded in historical sources. Informed of the barbarity displayed by Busr, 'Alī (A) dispatched Jāriyah ibn Qudāmah, a chief commander, to Hejaz with two thousand warriors to find and punish Busr. He left for Hejaz via Basra and reached Yemen, and track down Busr in the land of Banū Tamīm. Informed of Jāriyah's quest for him, Busr left for Yamāmah. Some people, notified of Jāriyah's departure, tried to impede Busr's progress, but he ultimately managed to reach Syria and present a report of his mission to Mu'āwiyah.

Busr said to Mu'āwiyah, 'I put to the sword your enemies on my way to Yemen and back.'

Mu'āwiyah said, 'You did not do that, God did!'

It is recorded in historical sources that Busr put thirty thousand people to the sword and burned others in fire. The Commander of the Faithful (A) frequently cursed him, saying, 'O Lord! Do not take his life until You make him lose his mind. O Lord! Curse Busr, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, and Mu'āwiyah and make them subject to Your wrath.' The Imam's (A) supplication was granted and Busr went insane before long. He frequently asked for a sword to take someone's life. His carers had to give him a wooden sword and he struck the walls and doors until he perished.

Muslim ibn 'Uqbah had a similar fate. He was sent on a similar mission by Yazīd to Ḥarrah, in the vicinity of Medina. Mu'āwiyah and his son, Yazīd, were alike in their attitudes, and even their mercenaries were similar in ruthlessness. In Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's words, 'One who takes after his father has done nothing wrong.'[1]

In a sermon the Imam (A) thus speaks about Busr, 'I only have Kufa in my territory. May God make you unbecoming if you [Kufa] are to fall into political turmoil! I have been informed that Busr has entered Yemen. By God! I assume that they will hold sway over you before long, since they are unanimous in their false cause but you disagree over treading the path of truth. You rise against your legitimate leader and they are obedient to their illegitimate leader. They are trusted by their leader but you are not as such. If I entrust the preservation of a wooden bowl to you, I fear that you may steal its handle. O Lord! I am tired of Kufans and they are annoyed with me. Leave at my disposal some people better than them and instead make some affliction fall into their share. O Lord! Melt their hearts like salt dissolved in water. By God! I would exchange you for a thousand cavalrymen descending from Firās ibn Ghanim.'[1]

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[1] [An old saying similar to 'Apples don't (or the apple doesn't) fall far from the tree' and 'A chip off the old block' – Translator.] *Wa man ashbaha abāhu famā ẓalama*, see *Ghārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 591–628; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 2, pp. 3–18; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 3, pp. 106–108; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 1, pp. 186–189; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, pp. 383–385.

3. Plundering by Sufyān ibn 'Awf

Mu'āwiyah made Sufyān ibn 'Awf al-Ghāmidī the commander of a well-equipped and courageous force in order to proceed towards the Euphrates and pass Hīt and Anbār. He was commanded to crush any resistance and plunder the resisting inhabitants of those regions; but, in the event that he did not encounter resistance, he would plunder all those regions until he reached Anbār. He was also commanded that if he did not encounter any forces there he would proceed towards Madā'in and then return to Syria. He was strictly forbidden from approaching Kufa.

He was thus addressed by Mu'āwiyah, 'Your plundering Abnār and Madā'in would be on a par with looting Kufa. Such plunder will cast fear into the hearts of the Iraqis but will boost the morale of our followers and will call to us those who are afraid of collaborating with us. Put to the sword those who rise against you on your way, devastate the villages, and plunder their possessions, since plundering their possessions will be on a par with taking their lives and it will fill them with desperation.'

Sufyān is reported as saying,

> I was at the Syrian camp where Mu'āwiyah gave a speech and called people to join my forces. Six thousand men were prepared before long to accompany me on my campaign. I proceeded towards the Euphrates and reached Hīt where its inhabitants were informed of my advance. They crossed the Euphrates and I did likewise, but I did not encounter any opposing forces.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 25.

> I reached Ṣandawdā' and its inhabitants fled away from me. I made up my mind to advance on Anbār. I held captive two young men from that region and inquired from them about the number of 'Alī's armed forces. They said, 'There were five hundred men, but some of them have departed for Kufa and we do not know how many are remaining. There might be two hundred men left.' I split my forces into different divisions and sent them to Anbār to engage in man-to-man combat there. Nevertheless, I noticed that it would be in vain to send those divisions to Anbār. I thus sent a cavalry of two hundred men to reinforce the infantry.
>
> It was in those circumstances that the Imam's forces were entirely dispersed and their commander, along with thirty men of his forces, lost their lives. I plundered Anbār and returned to Syria and reported the developments to Mu'āwiyah. He said, 'I knew that you are such a man.' Fear took hold of the Iraqis and multitudes of them left for Syria.[1]

It was reported to 'Alī (A) that Sufyān had entered Anbār and had killed his governor, Ḥassān ibn Ḥassān. The Imam (A) left his home in anger for the camp at Nukhaylah and was followed by people. The Imam (A) moved up to a high spot, glorified God, blessed His prophet, and thus spoke to the people,

> O people! Fighting in the cause of God is one of the gates of paradise that is opened by God to His intimate friends. It is the attire of God weariness and righteousness and also a strong suit of armour and an unbreakable shield. One who wilfully abandons them will be divinely given the garment of humiliation and affliction to wear. Such person will finally fall into affliction and misery, God Almighty will deny him His mercy and he will go insane...

It is reported to me that Sufyān ibn 'Awf has made an advance by Mu'āwiyah's command on Anbār, has put to sword Ḥassān ibn Ḥassān al-Bakrī, the governor of that city, and has put the guards to flight. It is reported to me that Sufyān's men have attacked the Muslim women and the non-Muslim women living under the protection of the Islamic government and looted their jewellery and they had no resort but to shedding tears. The insurgents returned to Syria unscathed with an abundance of loot. A Muslim may die of grief – and with good reason – upon hearing the incident. They are amazingly unanimous as to their misdeeds and you are divided instead of treading the path of truth.

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[1] *Ghārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 464–474; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 103.

> Your irresponsibility fills the heart with desperation and grief. May your faces become unbecoming and your hearts be filled with sorrow!...When I command you to battle in summer you say, 'It is too hot, grant us some respite that the weather cools off a little bit' and when I command you to fight in winter, you say, 'It is too cold, grant us some respite that the cold weather subsides'. Heat and cold are but your excuses to evade your obligations. You fear the sword! You lay claim to virility but you are divested of manly qualities. You are as unwise as children and newly-wed brides. I wish I had never seen and known you...[1]

Muʿāwiyah devised further plots, besides dispatching those three ruthless plunderers, to cast fear into the hearts of the Iraqis. He sent others on such missions. For instance, he ordered Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr al-Anṣārī to advance on ʿAyn al-Tamr, a city on the west bank of the Euphrates, to plunder it.[2] He sent Yazīd ibn Shajarah al-Ruwāwī to attack Mecca and plunder that city.[3] Such vicious stratagems proved successful as they sent shock waves through Iraq. It is worthy of note that such disastrous incidents occurred after the Battle of Nahrawān when the Iraqis, particularly the followers of the Imam (A), were deeply aggrieved and under pressure from inside and outside their land. Alas! Further catastrophic incidents were to agonise ʿAlī (A). They will be briefly treated below.

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 27.

[2] *Ghārāt*, vol. 2, p. 445.

[3] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 504.

2

The Conquest of Egypt and the Martyrdom of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr

It was after the assassination of ʿUthmān that all Muslim lands, except for Syria, were subject to ʿAlī's (A) rule. The Imam (A) in 36 / 657–8, the first year of his caliphate, sent Qays ibn Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah to Egypt to assume the governorship of that land.[1] However, the Imam (A) dismissed Qays after the Battle of Jamal and installed Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr as the governor of Egypt.

Two letters of the Imam (A), dealing with such events, are attested in historical sources, one of which was an official order entrusted to Muḥammd ibn Abī Bakr and the other was sent to Egypt following Muḥammad's accession to power. They are also incorporated in *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*,[2] among other sources. In his *Ghārāt*, Abū Isḥāq includes both letters and records the date of the first one as 1 Ramaḍān 36 / 21 February 657. The second letter is reported in detail by Abū Isḥāq in which the Imam (A) makes mention of numerous Islamic precepts. The second letter will be treated below in detail and mention will be made of the manner by which Muʿāwiyah found access to it and how it was passed on in his household.

The translation of the Imam's (A) first letter is as follows.

> In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful. This is a decree issued by the servant of God, ʿAlī, the Commander of the Faithful,

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[1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 3, p. 462.

[2] *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*, pp. 176–177.

> to Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr when he was installed as the governor of Egypt. He orders him to be God wary inwardly and outwardly and be obedient to Him in public and in private. He orders him to be lenient to Muslims, strict to vicious people, just to the non-Muslims living under the protection of the Islamic government, restoring the rights of the oppressed to them, uncompromising in dealing with wrong doers, showing forgiveness for people, beneficence to his utmost capacity as God favours the beneficent and chastises the maleficent.
>
> He commands that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr call people to obey the central government as well as to maintain Muslim solidarity, wherein lie unfathomable and unmeasurable rewards and blessings. He bids him to collect the land tax in due measure, without any increase or decrease, and distribute it among the needy, as it has been the common practice.
>
> He bids the governor to be humble in treating people, to consider them equal in his presence, and to avoid nepotism. He commands him to arbitrate justly and administers justice, to disfavour personal desires, and to not fear the censure of those who criticise him. God is on the side of those who are God wary and prefer obedience to Him over obedience to others. Farewell.
>
> This letter was committed to writing by 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Rāfi', the freed slave of the Messenger of God, on 1 Ramaḍān 36 / 21 February 657.[1]

The date of this letter, coincident with the dismissal of Qays ibn 'Ubādah, exhibits that Qays' tenure had been too brief, since the Commander of the Faithful was elected as the caliph of the *ummah* in late 35 AH / 656 CE. The letter was thus written in the eighth month of his caliphate. Upon the receipt of the letter, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr delivered a speech to the Egyptians and read the Imam's (A) letter to them.

Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr wrote a letter from Egypt to the Imam (A) in which he made queries about the lawful and unlawful and the prophetic tradition. In his letter to the Imam (A) he said, 'From Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr to the servant of God, the Commander of the Faithful. May God bless you. I thank God who is the only God. If the Commander of the Faithful deems it fit and appropriate, he is requested to write a letter to us and clarify our obligations and the precepts of arbitration in which people like me are well-versed. May God bless the Commander of the Faithful with further rewards.'

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[1] *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, p. 224.

The Imam (A), in response to his queries, provided him with instructions about arbitration, minor ablution, times of prayer, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, fasting, and spiritual retreat in mosques for undisturbed prayer and remembrance of God (*i'tikāf*) and gave him wise counsel and admonition about death, divine reckoning of deeds and misdeeds, and matters about paradise and hell.

The full text of the Imam's (A) letter is included in Abū Isḥāq al-Thaqafī's *al-Ghārāt*. He reports that upon the receipt of the Imam's (A) letter, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr frequently consulted it as the basis for his arbitrations. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ obtained access to the letters which he collected and sent to Mu'āwiyah after Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr received the final blow and lost his life. It was from among the collection of letters that the letter in question attracted Mu'āwiyah's attention and he read it more carefully.

Noticing Mu'āwiyah's amazement, Walīd ibn 'Utbah said, 'Have this letter burned.'

Mu'āwiyah said 'Take your time! You are not supposed to say anything about that.'

Walīd said, 'You are not supposed to! Should people learn that Abū Turāb's [the Imam's] instructions are with you and you are learning them to make use of them in your arbitration? Granted that, why are you fighting against 'Alī?'

Mu'āwiyah said, 'Woe unto you! You are instructing me to cast such treasure of knowledge into fire? By God! I have not read anything more comprehensive, more authoritative, and clearer than this letter.'

Reiterating his words, Walīd said, 'If you are amazed by 'Alī's erudition and arbitration, why are you waging battle against him?'

Mu'āwiyah replied, 'Had he not taken 'Uthmān's life and had he been content with arbitration we would have learned from him.' He was silent for a while, looked around, and said, 'We never say that these letters were dictated by 'Alī but we allege that they are the letters of Abū Bakr which had been inherited by his son, Muḥammad, and we utilise it as our basis for arbitration and issuing decrees.'

The Imam's letters were kept in the Umayyad archives until 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz acceded to caliphate and declared that those letters included the instructions by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

'Alī (A) learned, after the conquest of Egypt and the death of Muḥammad, that the letter had fallen into the hands of Mu'āwiyah and he regretted it. 'Abd Allāh ibn Salamah said, 'The Imam (A) performed prayer with us and then we noticed his sadness. He was reciting a poem about sorrowing over the past. We asked about what he intended by reciting that poem. He replied, "I made Muḥammad ibn [Abū] Bakr the governor of Egypt. He wrote a letter to me and inquired about the Prophet's tradition. I elaborated on the subject in a letter but he lost his life and the letter fell into the hands of the enemy."'

'Alī's (A) Governor and the Non-Aligned

A number of government officials under Muḥammad ibn Qays, who was later dismissed from governorship of Egypt, resigned from their positions and declared their neutrality. After a lapse of one month from the governorship of Abū Bakr's son, he asked the non-aligned to choose between declaration of their obedience to the government or leaving Egypt. In response, they asked for some respite to reflect on their choices, but he declined their request. They persisted in their stance and prepared to defend themselves.

It was at that time that the Battle of Ṣiffīn broke out. Informed of the arbitration of the two arbitrators, one representing the Imam (A) and the other Mu'āwiyah, and the call to a truce, the non-aligned took the liberty to rise openly against the governor, a move that made the governor dispatch Ḥārith ibn Jumhān and Yazīd ibn Ḥārith al-Kinānī to provide them with wise counsel, but the two emissaries were killed by the opponents.

Abū Bakr's son dispatched a third emissary but he was killed en route. There were some individuals who, emboldened by the murder of the emissaries, tried to call people to take revenge for the blood of 'Uthmān, similar to the Syrians. The stage had been set for voicing opposition; as a consequence, the insurrectionists found adherents and Egypt sank into unrest and the young governor failed to restore order.

Informed of the riots breaking out in Egypt, the Commander of the Faithful (A) said, 'Only two persons may restore order and peace to Egypt – Qays ibn Sa'd, the former governor, and Mālik al-Ashtar.' However, he had installed Mālik as the governor of Jazīrah.[1] Qays ibn Sa'd was in the Imam's company and he was needed in the Imam's (A) army that was positioned in Iraq. As a consequence, the Imam (A) communicated a message to Mālik al-Ashtar who was in Naṣībīn,[2] a vast region lying between Iraq and Syria, and thus briefed him on his situation and the circumstances in Egypt: 'You are one of the pillars, thanks to whom I establish the religion. Uproot the obstinacy of the insurgents and fill up the abysmal gaps! I had installed Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr as the governor of Egypt, but he has not been able to vanquish the insurrection owing to his naivety and simplicity. Entrust your affairs to a trusted substitute and depart immediately to investigate the issues and situation.'

Mālik accordingly installed Shabīb ibn 'Āmir as his substitute and hastened to reach the Imam's (A) presence. Updating Mālik on the recent developments in Egypt the Imam (A) said, 'Depart immediately for Egypt as you are the only one who may take care of such a situation. You do not need instructions as I am aware of your sound judgement and discernment. Invoke God to grant you success in such circumstances and intertwine leniency with strictness, but strive to act upon leniency and exercise your powers when you find no other alternative.'

Mu'āwiyah, aspiring to lay his hands on Egypt, was distressed to hear of the Imam's (A) dispatching Mālik there. He also knew that Mālik's holding the reins of Egypt would worsen the circumstances for him worse than Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr's rule. He thus devised a plot and exempted a village from paying taxes and thereby paved the path for having Mālik assassinated.

The people of Egypt demanded the Imam (A) to install immediately a substitute for the governor in office and he thus responded to their letter, 'From the servant of God, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Commander of the Faithful, to the Muslims of Egypt. I extend my greetings to you. I praise God who has no partner. I have dispatched a man to you who never falls asleep in moments of horror and is more scathing than fire to disbelievers. He is Mālik, son of Ḥārith, from the tribe of Madhḥij. Listen to him and follow his orders so long as he sticks to the truth. He is a sword of God that is never blunted and his sword strikes nobody incorrectly. Advance on the enemy on his order and cease to proceed upon his command. His command is mine. I dispatch him to Egypt as I prefer you over myself for I am benevolent to you and I deal with the enemy most fiercely.'[1]

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[1] Upper Mesopotamia. [Translator]

[2] Nisibis, a city in northern Mesopotamia. [Translator]

The newly installed governor of the Imam (A) departed with the required equipment and upon arrival at Qulzum,[2] lying at a distance of a two day journey from Fusṭāṭ,[3] and dismounted at the home of an inhabitant of that city. The host gained Mālik's trust through his hospitality and finally poisoned him with some honey. Thus the sharp sword of God rested for ever in its sheath. Mālik died in 38 AH / 658 CE in Qulzum where his remains were put to rest.

It goes without saying that Mālik's host was a dignitary in Qulzum and he had been bought by Mu'āwiyah, Mālik's enemy.[4] The events leading to his martyrdom have been reported differently, and more elaborately, in some historical sources, according to which when Mu'āwiyah was informed that the Imam (A) had entrusted the governorship of Egypt to Mālik, he asked a landowner of influence in that region to take the life of Mālik in exchange for exemption from paying tax to Mu'āwiyah when Egypt falls into the latter's sway. Aiming at boosting the people's morale and proving that he and his followers trod the path of God, he asked the Syrians to curse Mālik all the time and pray to God to take his life. He believed that the Syrians would rejoice at Mālik's death and they would further trust their leader.

When Mālik reached Qulzum, Mu'āwiyah's agent invited him to stay at his home and also tried to gain his trust by saying that the cost of his hospitality would be paid from the taxes. He pretended to be a friend of 'Alī (A) and thus gained Mālik's trust. As a token of his hospitality he asked Mālik to join him for dinner. The host offered him honey and it was so laced with poison that Mālik died instantly after partaking of it.

Informed of Mālik's death, Mu'āwiyah ascended the pulpit and thus addressed the people, 'O people! The son of Abū Ṭālib had two strong hands: one of them ('Ammār ibn Yāsir) fell in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, and the other (Mālik al-Ashtar) was cut off today.'[1]

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 38; *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, p. 260.

[2] A city on the Gulf of al-Qulzum. Caravans traversed thence to Egypt within three days; see *Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilā'*.

[3] A city in the vicinity of Alexandria, see *Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilā'*.

[4] Ibn al-Kathīr, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 7, p. 312.

The Death that Gladdened Some and Saddened Others

The Syrians were gladdened by Mālik's death as they bore a grudge against him since the breakout of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. Informed of his martyrdom, the Imam (A) burst into tears, saying, 'O Mālik! The death of the like of you must be mourned by women.' He also said, 'Who is the like of Mālik?' In a speech which he delivered on the pulpit he said, 'We indeed belong to God and indeed to Him we return. Glorified is God, the Lord of the worlds. O Lord! I endure the bereavement of al-Ashtar's martyrdom in your cause as his death is one of the greatest afflictions of our time. May God bless Mālik. He honoured his covenant, lived his lifespan, and met his Lord. We had been prepared to exercise patience in the face of afflictions after the Prophet, but I say that losing Mālik is one of the greatest of afflictions.'[2]

Fuḍayl is reported as saying, 'I joined 'Alī (A) when he was informed of Mālik's martyrdom and I saw that he was regretting for his loss, saying, "May God bless Mālik. What a man he was. If he was a mountain, he was an unparalleled one, if a rock, he was a hard one. By God! O Mālik! Your death makes a world tremble and gladdens another world. Mourning women should weep for his loss. Is there anybody equal to him?" 'Alī (A) was sorry for his loss and sorrow was reflected in his face for days.'

The Imam's (A) Letter to Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr

Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was saddened for his dismissal by the Imam (A) from the governorship of Egypt and the substitution of Mālik for him. Hearing of his sadness, the Imam wrote a letter to him, informed him of Mālik's martyrdom, and thus consoled him,

> It has been reported to me that you were unhappy about the dispatching of al-Ashtar to Egypt, but I did not dispatch him because you failed in the accomplishment of your mission.
>
> I dismissed you from the governorship of Egypt to entrust to you the governorship of some region with less issues to face and which would

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[1] *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, p. 264; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 72; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 352.

[2] *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, p. 264; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 77.

> be of more interest to you. I chose a new governor for Egypt, somebody who was benevolent to us and strict in dealing with enemies. May God bless him! He lived his lifespan and met his last day as we were satisfied with him. May God be satisfied with him and double his rewards!

It is incumbent upon you to lead your forces to a camp out of town to confront the enemy. You need to make use of your sound judgement and spare no efforts to prepare yourself for engagement. Call people to be obedient to God and seek assistance from Him and He will render you support in your affairs and He will render you aid in hardships.[1]

Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr's Response to the Imam (A)

When Muḥammad received the Imam's (A) letter, he thus responded to him, 'I received the letter of the Commander of the Faithful and I read it. There is nobody stricter than me with his enemies and more affectionate than me to his friends. I have camped out of town and have provided all people an amnesty, except for those who have confronted us with their forces and those who pretend to be on our side. I am, in all circumstances, obedient to the Commander of the Faithful.'[2]

Dispatching 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ to Egypt

After the Battle of Ṣiffīn and sowing discord in 'Alī's (A) army by the Khawārij, Mu'āwiyah seized the opportunity and dispatched 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ as the commander of any army to seize Egypt from the Imam's (A) domain. He summoned a number of his generals, including 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Ḥabīb ibn Maslamah al-Fihrī, Busr ibn Arṭāh al-'Āmirī, Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khālid. He also called a number of non-Qurayshī individuals for consultation. He asked them, 'Do you know why I have called you?'

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ replied bluntly, 'You have called us to conquer Egypt, as its land is fertile, tax is collected there in abundance, and your dignity and that of your followers depend on its conquest.'

Mu'āwiyah admitted that 'Amr was right and remembered that he had promised him to install him as the governor of Egypt when he gained victory over ʿAlī. An array of topics was discussed in that session and it was ultimately decided that numerous letters had to be sent to the Egyptians in order to encourage supporters to resist steadfastly and to call their foes to reconciliation or to threaten them with confrontation.

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[1] *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, p. 268.

[2] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 269.

Muʿāwiyah thus sent two messages for two opponents of ʿAlī (A), Maslamah and Muʿāwiyah al-Kindī, and dispatched ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ to Egypt as the commander of a sizeable army. Upon his arrival at the frontiers of Egypt, ʿAmr was encircled by ʿUthmān's adherents. ʿAmr sent a message to the governor of Egypt, saying, 'I am not here for engagement and shedding your blood. The people of Egypt are unanimously against you and they regret their obedience to you.' He sent his message with Muʿāwiyah's letter to Muḥammad. Having read both messages, the governor of Egypt sent them to the Imam (A) and reported to him the Syrian advance on the borders of Egypt, requesting the Imam (A) to render him financial and military support.

The Imam (A) enjoined the governor of Egypt to resist against the Syrians. Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr responded to the letters of ʿAmr and Muʿāwiyah and ultimately mobilised his forces to confront the army led by ʿAmr. Kinānah ibn Bushr commanded ʿAmr's vanguard that numbered two thousand and he followed his general with an army of two thousand men. Confronting the Syrian army, the Egyptian vanguard dealt severe blows to the Syrians but was ultimately defeated due to insufficient strength.

Kinānah dismounted his horse and, along with his companions, engaged in man-to-man combat with the enemy and was martyred as he was reciting this verse: '*No soul may die except by God's leave, at an appointed time. Whoever desires the reward of this world, We will give him of it; and whoever desires the reward of the hereafter, We will give him of it; and soon We will reward the grateful*' (3:145).

The Martyrdom of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr

Emboldened by Kinānah ibn Bushr's martyrdom, the Syrian army advanced on Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr's camp and noticed that his forces were dispersed. Muḥammad was wandering about until he sought refuge in ruins. His whereabouts was discovered by Muʿāwiyah ibn Ḥudayj who arrested him as he was dying of thirst and took him to Fusṭāṭ, the headquarters of 'Amr's army.

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr, Muḥammad's brother, was in 'Amr's army. He shouted, 'I will not allow you to slay my brother in such a state.' He asked 'Amr to order his commander, Mu'āwiyah ibn Ḥudayj, to spare his life. 'Amr dispatched his emissary to Ibn Ḥudayj to spare Muḥammad's life and surrender him, but his army commander said, 'Kinānah ibn Bushr, my cousin, was killed and Muḥammad's life should not be spared.' When Muḥammad learned of what was in store for him, he asked for water, but Ibn Ḥudayj said that 'Uthmān had met his end while he was thirsty and declined his request.

Ibn Ḥudayj abused Muḥammad verbally and said, 'I will place your corpse inside this dead donkey to be burned.'

Muḥammad said, 'You, enemies of God, have similarly treated His friends. I pray to God that He makes that fire, similar to Abraham's bonfire, cold and pleasant for me and punishes you and your friends for committing such sin. May God burn you and your chief, Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, in the ever blazing hellfire.'

Enraged by Muḥammad's words, Mu'āwiyah ibn Ḥudayj beheaded him, placed his dead body inside a dead donkey, and burned it. Two persons were most grieved by Muḥammad's martyrdom. His sister, 'Ā'ishah, burst into tears and would curse after each prayer Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, and Mu'āwiyah ibn Ḥudayj. 'Ā'ishah assumed the guardianship of his brother's wife and child, and Qāsim, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr's son, was raised under her guardianship. The other person was Asmā' bint 'Umays, who had been honoured by being Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib's wife and later married Abū Bakr, gave birth to Muḥammad, and after Abū Bakr's death married 'Alī (A) from whom she gave birth to Yaḥyā. Asmā' was deeply grieved over her son's sad fate, but she maintained her composure, performed prayers, cursed his murderers, and ultimately suffered from severe bleeding.

In a letter to Mu'āwiyah, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ informed him of their martyrdom and, as with other dishonest politicians, pretended to be scrupulous, saying, 'We called them to the Book and the prophetic tradition, but they turned away from the truth and persisted in their error and depravity. We finally had to confront them. We sought divine assistance and He struck them on their faces and backs and surrendered them to us with tied hands.'

The Imam (A) was informed of Muḥammad's Martyrdom

'Abd Allāh ibn Qu'ayyid entered Kufa as he was mourning and informed 'Alī (A) of Muḥammad's tragic martyrdom. The Imam had people assemble to hear his words. He said to them, 'Muḥammad and your brethren complain about the Egyptians. They have been subjugated by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ who is the enemy of God as well as your enemy. I do not expect the support of those who have been led astray by falsehood, those whose trust in their tyrannical chief is stronger than your eagerness to quest for the truth. It is as if they have attacked you by advancing on Egypt. Render them assistance immediately. O servants of God! Egypt excels Syria in merits and bounties and Egyptians excel Syrians in possessing good qualities. Do not abandon Egypt. Having control of Egypt brings you dignity and entails misery for the enemy. Depart immediately for the camp to join us tomorrow.' After days of negotiations between 'Alī and the Iraqi tribal chiefs, Mālik ibn Ka'b led an army of two thousand men to Egypt.[1]

In a letter to Ibn 'Abbās the Imam (A) thus reports the developments:

> Egypt fell into the hands of the Enemy and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, may God bless him, was martyred. I pray to God that He grants us rewards for enduring such loss. Losing an affectionate son, an industrious official, a sharp sword, and a formidable force against the enemy is too much to bear.
>
> I enjoined people to support him. I said to them that he was in urgent need of assistance. I called everyone, overtly and covertly, to join him. Some people declared their support nonchalantly, some others pretended to be ill, and a third group denied him their assistance. I pray to God to deliver me immediately from these people.[2]

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[1] *Ghārāt*, vol. 1, pp. 282–294.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 35.

Grieving over Muḥammad's martyrdom, 'Alī (A) said tearfully, 'He was a son to me and a brother to my children and my nephews.'[1] He also said, 'I held him in great affection and I had raised him myself.'[2]

Considering the occurrence of such frequent incidents, following the Battle of Ṣiffīn, people of sound judgement were able to predict the decline of 'Alī's (A) caliphate because of the imprudence of his undiscerning companions. Mu'āwiyah held sway in Syria and Egypt had fallen into the hands of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ. Plundering insurgents, aiming at undermining the central government and following Mu'āwiyah's orders, invaded the adjacent regions and thereby fostered instability. What was the Imam's (A) policy on such circumstances? How could he seek assistance from the blind hearted Iraqis in order to eradicate corruption? It is reported in historical sources that in his last days the Imam (A) delivered a fiery speech that reinvigorated the people of Iraq.

The Imam's (A) Last Sermon

Nawfal ibn Fuḍālah is reported as saying, 'It was in the last days of the Imam (A) that Ja'dah al-Makhzūmī installed a platform of stone for the Imam (A). He sat on it as he was wearing a woollen shirt and his sword strap and sandals were made of date palm fibre. His forehead was calloused from repeated prostrations in prayer. He thus opened his speech,

> Glorified is God to whom the servants and the affairs of the world return. We praise Him for his great beneficence, manifest proof, and ever-increasing generosity.
>
> O people! I conveyed to you the wise advice of the prophets and what was imparted by their successors to the coming generations. I resorted to exercising force but you did not take a lesson. I urged you by my admonitions, but you did not join me. By God! Are you awaiting a leader other than me to clear your way and lead you to the path of truth?
>
> Our brethren whose blood was shed at Ṣiffīn did not lose anything since they did not see such day to drink from the cups of sorrow and the muddy water of such miserable life. By God! They met their Lord and He completed their rewards and admitted them to His secure world. Where

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[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 194.

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* ('Abduh's edition), Letter 65.

> are my brethren who trod the path of truth and lost their lives in that cause? Where is ʿAmmār? Where is Ibn Tayhān? Where is the one with two testimonies?[1] Where are the like of them and their brethren who were steadfast and persevering in their cause?

Nawfal says, ‘The Imam (A) struck his cheeks, burst into tears, and said, “Alas! Alas, the brethren whom we lost read the Qur’an and acted upon it. They reflected on its precepts and acted accordingly. They reinvigorated the prophetic tradition and wiped out unwarranted innovations. They were called to battle against the enemy and they did answer the call. They trusted their leader and followed him.”’

The Imam (A) said, ‘Servants of God! It is incumbent upon you to fight in the cause of God. I set up the camp today and those intending to join the battle may prepare themselves for departure.’[2]

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[1] Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī whose testimony was accepted by the Prophet (S) as two testimonies, hence his designation, Dhū al-Shahādatayn; see Muḥsin Amīn, *Aʿyān al-Shīʿah*, vol. 6, p. 317; *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sayyid Jaʿfar Shahīdī’s translation, p. 495. [Translator]

[2] *Nahj al-Balāghah* (ʿAbduh’s edition), Sermon 177.

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The Last Page of the Imam's Life

Martyrdom at the Prayer Niche

The Battle of Nahrawān came to an end and ʿAlī (A) returned to Kufa, but a number of the Khawārij who had repented rose once again against the Imam (A) and sowed discord and insurrection. ʿAlī communicated a message to them and called them to reconciliation and peace and warned them against insubordination. Nonetheless, having lost his hope in guiding them to the straight path, he exercised his power in order to deal them a severe blow; as a consequence, they suffered fatalities and casualties and some of them were put to flight. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam, a member of the insurgent group that had escaped the blow, fled to Mecca.

The surviving insurgents made Mecca their headquarters. Three of them by the names of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī, Burak ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tamīmī, and ʿAmr ibn Bakr al-Tamīmī[1] held a meeting one evening and discussed the circumstances, bloodshed, and civil wars and recalled their memories of the Battle of Nahrawān and their fallen companions. They ultimately came to the conclusion that ʿAlī (A), Muʿāwiyah, and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ were responsible for the bloodshed and fratricide and taking their lives would urge Muslims to know where they stood and they would be able to choose a caliph of their own will. They made a covenant and swore on their honour that each of them assumed the responsibility for assassinating one of the three.

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[1] In his *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl* (p. 213), al-Dīnawarī records Burak ibn ʿAbd Allāh's name as Nazzāl ibn ʿĀmir and that of ʿAmr ibn Bakr as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālik al-Ṣaydāwī. In *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 423), al-Masʿūdī records the name of Burak ibn ʿAbd Allāh as Ḥajjāj ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣarīmī, nicknamed Burak, and records that of ʿAmr ibn Bakr as Zādawayh.

Ibn Muljam offered to take 'Alī's (A) life, 'Amr ibn Bakr accepted to kill 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, and Burak ibn 'Abd Allāh assumed the responsibility to assassinate Mu'āwiyah.[1] They devised their conspiracy in secret in Mecca and they chose the night of 19 Ramaḍān to accomplish their mission. Each of them departed for the city where he was supposed to fulfil his mission. 'Amr ibn Bakr departed for Egypt to kill 'Amr ibn Āṣ, Burak ibn 'Abd Allāh went to Syria to murder Mu'āwiyah, and Ibn Muljam travelled to Kufa to take 'Alī's (A) life.

Burak ibn 'Abd Allāh went to the mosque of Syria and stood to perform the congregational prayer in the first line. When Mu'āwiyah prostrated in prayer he attacked him with his sword but he was too nervous and shy to hit his target and he only managed to strike a blow on Mu'āwiyah's thigh and badly wounded him. Mu'āwiyah was carried to his home where he was placed in his bed.

When the assassin was brought to him, he asked, 'How did you dare to attack me?'

He replied, 'If you spare my life I will bear you some glad tiding.'

He asked, 'What is your glad tiding?'

He replied, "Alī has been assassinated by one of my companions and if you do not believe me, have me confined until you receive the intelligence. If he fails to accomplish his mission I will undertake the fulfilment of the mission and return to you.' Mu'āwiyah held him in confinement until he learned of 'Alī's assassination. He released him and it is also reported that he had him executed instantly.[2]

Physicians examined Mu'āwiyah's wound and said, 'If you do not intend to father children, the wound may be healed by medication; otherwise, the wound needs to be cauterised. Afraid of treatment with cauterisation, Mu'āwiyah consented to not being able to father more children and said that he would be content to have only Yazīd and 'Abd Allāh.'[3]

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[1] *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 29; *Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, p. 137.

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 114.

[3] *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 30; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 113.

It was on the same night that 'Amr ibn Bakr stood in the first line of the congregational prayer at a mosque in Egypt. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, as luck would have it, was running a high fever; as a consequence, he was substituted by Khārijah ibn Ḥanīfah (Ḥudhāfah)[1] in leading the congregational prayer. 'Amr ibn Bakr murdered Khārijah by mistake and when he learned of his mistake, he said, 'I intended to take 'Amr's life, but God willed to have Khārijah killed.'[2]

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī arrived at Kufa on 20 Sha'bān 40 AH / 29 December 660 CE. Informed of his arrival the Imam (A) said, 'Is he here? I have fulfilled my obligations and now the time is ripe.' Ibn Muljam stayed at the home of Ash'ath ibn Qays for a month and prepared for his mission by sharpening his sword.[3] There he made the acquaintance of a Khārijī young woman by the name of Qaṭām and fell in love with her. According to al-Mas'ūdī, she was Ibn Muljam's cousin and her father and brother had fallen in the Battle of Nahrawān. She was one of the most beautiful young women in Kufa. He ignored the traditions when his eyes were cast on her and asked for her hand in marriage.[4] Qaṭām said, 'I accept your proposal on the condition that you provide me with a dowry of my liking.'

'Abd al-Raḥmān asked her, 'What is your liking?'

Noticing that he was already smitten, she asked for a substantial dowry, saying, 'Three thousand dirhams, a slave, a maid, and the assassination of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.'

Ibn Muljam said, 'I assumed that you did not love me when you asked me to take 'Alī's life!'

Qaṭām said, 'Try to catch him unawares. Then, if you take his life, we will have taken our revenge and we will lead a good life. If you lose your life in this cause, you will be rewarded by God in the hereafter and those rewards will be everlasting and better than worldly possessions.'

Ibn Muljam said, 'Behold that I am in Kufa to make an attempt on his life.'[5]

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[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 212.

[2] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 312.

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 423.

[5] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 213; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 423.

As to Qaṭām's dowry a poet says:

I have seen no dowry like that of Qaṭām,
to be undertaken by a generous man.
Her dowry consisted of three thousand dirhams,
a slave, a maid, and murdering 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (A) with a sharp sword;
there is no dowry,
more expensive than [the life of] 'Alī (A),
however costly it may be, there is no crime worse
than that perpetrated by Ibn Muljam.[1]

Qaṭām said to Ibn Muljam that she would have some men of her tribe render him assistance and she arranged likewise. She asked another Khārijī by the name of Wardān ibn Mujālid from the same tribe, Taym al-Rabāb, to accompany him. Intent on taking 'Alī's (A) life, Ibn Muljam met with Shabīb ibn Bajarah, a Khārijī from the tribe of Ashja', and said to him, 'Are you seeking honour and dignity in this life and the hereafter?!'

He asked, 'What is it you intend to say?'

Ibn Muljam replied, 'Render me assistance in taking 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib's life.'

Shabīb said, 'May your mother mourn for your loss! Are you ignorant of 'Alī's efforts and sacrifices in the lifetime of the Prophet (S)?'

Ibn Muljam replied, 'Woe unto you! Do you not know that he consented to human arbitration as to the divine Word and had our believing brethren killed? We will thus take his life so as to take revenge on him for taking the lives of our brethren.'[2] Shabīb agreed to Ibn Muljam's request and the latter procured a sword, laced it with fatal poison, and entered the mosque of Kufa at the specified time.

Qaṭām who had retreated at the mosque for spiritual purposes on Friday 13 Ramaḍān was met by Ibn Muljam and Shabīb. She told them that Mujāshi' ibn Wardān ibn 'Alqamah had also volunteered to collaborate with them. Qaṭām covered their heads with silk kerchiefs on that night. The three men held their swords in their hands and stayed the night at the mosque with others. They sat at one of the gates of the mosque known as the Suddah gate (*bāb al-suddah*).[1]

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[1] *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 214; *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 582; *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 37. In his *Murūj al-Dhahab* al-Mas'ūdī attributes these lines to Ibn Muljam.

[2] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 571.

The Night before the Imam's (A) Martyrdom

The Imam (A) would make references to his martyrdom in the month of Ramaḍān of that year. Once on the pulpit in mid-Ramaḍān, he touched his beard, saying, 'The most miserable of people will dye my beard with the blood [gushing from] my head.' He is also reported as saying, 'The month of Ramaḍān is here and it is the best month. It is in this month that developments will occur to the government. Behold that you will go on pilgrimage to Mecca this year in one line (without a leader) as I will not be with you any longer.'[2]

The Imam's (A) companions would say that he was making a reference to his death, but they were not able to understand it.[3] The Imam (A) stayed at the home of one of his children in his last days. He broke his fast in the evening at the home of his son, Ḥasan (A), another night at Ḥusayn's (A), and another at the home of his son-in-law, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far, Lady Zaynab's (A) husband. The Imam (A) would not eat more than three morsels. One of his friends inquired about the reason for eating such insufficient amount of food. He replied, 'The divine command is coming and I want my stomach to be empty. There is only a night or two left.' It was on that night that he received the blow.

He was the guest of his daughter, Umm Kulthūm, on the night of his martyrdom. He broke his fast by eating three morsels of food and then spent the rest of the night on prayer. He was distressed from the early part of the night until daybreak. At times, he gazed at the sky and the movements of the stars. His anxiety grew as the daybreak approached. He kept saying, 'By God! Neither I say untruth nor does the one who has disclosed it to me. This is the night on which I have been promised to fall a martyr.'[4]

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[1] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 424; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 83; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 115; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 195; *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 32; *Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 7, p. 325; *Istī'āb*, vol. 2, p. 282; *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, vol. 1, p. 161.

[2] Al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, Islāmiyyah, p. 151; *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, vol. 1, p. 163.

[3] Al-Mufīd, *Irshād*, Islāmiyyah, p. 151; *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, vol. 1, p. 163.

[4] *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, vol. 1, p. 164.

The Prophet (S) had informed him of his martyrdom. 'Alī (A) is reported as saying that the Prophet (S) once closed his speech tearfully by recounting the merits of the month of Ramaḍān. I asked him why he was in tears and he replied, 'It is because of what will be in store for you in this month. It is as if I see that you are performing prayer and the most miserable of the people in the world, similar to the slayer of the she-camel of Thamūd, rises up to strike a blow on your head and to dye your beard with your blood.'[1]

That horrifying night ultimately came to an end and 'Alī (A) departed at dawn for the mosque to perform his dawn prayer. The ducks in his yard followed him and pulled his garment. When some members of his household tried to shoo them away, he said, 'Let them be! They are crying and they will be followed by mourners.'[2]

Imam Ḥasan (A) asked, 'Why do you take it as an inauspicious sign?' He replied, 'My son! I do not take it as such, but I feel that I will be slain.' Distressed by her father's words, Umm Kulthūm said, 'Please send Ja'dah to lead the congregational prayer at the mosque.' The Imam (A) said, 'It is impossible to flee from divine ordainment.' He then fastened his belt tightly and left for the mosque as he was whispering these lines:

Fasten your belt tightly for death,
since you will be met by him.
Do not be restless to meet death,
when you will be met by him.[3]

The Imam (A) entered the mosque, stood to perform prayer, pronounced the *takbīr* [i.e. *Allāhu akbar*; God is Greatest], recited a *sūrah*, and prostrated in prayer. Ibn Muljam rushed towards him, saying in a loud voice, 'Judgement belongs to God not to you, 'Alī!' and struck 'Alī's (A) head with his sword which had been laced with poison. The blow was accidentally received on the spot which had been formerly struck by 'Amr ibn 'Abd al-Wudd;[4] as a consequence, his head was split. In his

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[1] *'Uyūn al-Riḍā*, Qum, vol. 1, p. 297.

[2] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 212; *Irshād*, p. 652; *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, vol. 1, p. 165; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 425.

[3] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 429; *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 31.

[4] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 584.

Amālī, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī narrates a hadith from Imam al-Riḍā (A) who in turn narrates it from his father on the authority of Imam al-Sajjād (A): 'Ibn Muljam struck a blow on 'Alī's (A) head as he was in prostration.'[1]

In his *Tafsīr*, Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, the Shi'i Qur'an exegete of renown, reports that in his first *rak'ah* of prayer before he received a blow on his head by Ibn Muljam, he had recited eleven verses from Sūrah al-Anbiyā', the twenty-first *sūrah* of the Qur'an.[2] Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, the famous Sunni scholar, reports: 'When the Imam stood in the prayer niche he was attacked by a number of individuals and Ibn Muljam struck a blow on him,[3] and they immediately fled away. Blood gushed out of his head in the prayer niche and his beard was dyed with his blood. He said, "By the Lord of Ka'bah, I found deliverance." He then read this verse: "*From it did We create you, into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you forth another time*" (20:55).'

Having received the blow, 'Alī (A) said in a loud voice, 'Seize him!' People rushed towards Ibn Muljam, but he wielded his sword at anybody who dared to approach him. Qutham ibn 'Abbās rushed forward and seized him by his arms and flung him to the ground. He was brought to 'Alī (A) who asked the assailant, 'Are you Ibn Muljam?'

He said, 'Yes.'

The Imam said to Ḥasan (A), 'Take care of your enemy. Feed him and tie him up. If I die, have him join me so as I converse with him before my Lord, but if I survive, I will either forgive or punish him.'[4]

Along with Banū Hāshim, Ḥasan (A) and Ḥusayn (A) placed the Imam (A) on a carpet and carried him home. Ibn Muljam was brought again to the Imam (A) who looked at him and said, 'If I die, take his life as he made an attempt on my life, but if I survive, I will look into the matter.'

Ibn Muljam said, 'I have bought this sword for a thousand dirhams and spent a thousand dirhams on lacing it with poison. If my trust is breached, may God Almighty take his life.'[5]

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[1] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, old edition, vol. 9, p. 650, quoting *Amālī*.

[2] Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 425.

[3] *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ*, Najaj, p. 177.

[4] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 212.

[5] *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 586; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 185.

Umm Kulthūm said to Ibn Muljam, 'Enemy of God! Did you take the life of the Commander of the Faithful?'

The accursed man replied, 'I did not take the life of the Commander of the Faithful, but I have taken the life of your father.'

Umm Kulthūm said, 'I wish that the Imam recovers from the blow.'

Ibn Muljam said impudently, 'I see that you will mourn for him. By God! I have struck such blow on him that had the world received such blow it would have perished.'[1]

Some milk was brought for the Imam (A) from which he sipped and said, 'Give some of this milk to the prisoner and do not hurt him.'

The physicians of Kufa visited him. The most experienced of them was Athīr ibn 'Amr who treated wounds. He examined the wound and asked for the fresh lung of a lamb. He took out a vein from it and placed it on the wound. He then took it out, saying, ‘‘Alī, prepare your testament as the blow has affected the brain and there is no treatment for the wound.' The Imam (A) asked for pen and paper and dictated his testament to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn which was actually addressed to humanity. It is narrated along with its transmission chains by a number of traditionists and historians flourishing earlier and later than Sayyid al-Raḍī.[2] It is to be noted that the testament is more elaborate than what is narrated by Sayyid al-Raḍī in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Selections of the testament will follow below.

> I enjoin you to fear God and avoid worldly pursuits, even though the world turns towards you. Do not regret your worldly losses. Say the truth. Strive for gaining divine rewards. Be an enemy to wrong doers and help the wronged.
>
> I enjoin you, all my children, members of my household, and those addressed in my testament to fear God, improve your affairs, and make peace between opposing parties (*dhāt al-bayn*); as I heard from

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[1] *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 36; *Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 214; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 24; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 169; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 85; *'Iqd al-Farīd*, vol. 4, p. 359; *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 1, p. 586.

[2] Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, *Mu'ammarūn wa al-Waṣāyā*, p. 149; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 6, p. 85; *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 197; *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 141; *Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 51; partly reported in *Murūj al-Dhahab* (vol. 2, p. 425); *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 38.

> your grandfather (S) saying, 'Making peace between people is more meritorious than performing prayer and fasting for one year.'
>
> By God! By God! Take care of orphans, lest they starve, lest they perish because of neglecting their well-being. By God! By God! Be friendly to your neighbours, as your prophet enjoined you to treat them as such. He always enjoined others to treat them so well that we thought he would allot them some share in inheritance.
>
> By God! By God! Be attentive to acting upon the precepts of the Qur'an, lest you may be surpassed by others in so doing. By God! By God! Be attentive to performing prayer that is the pillar of your faith. By God! By God! Be attentive to the House of your God. Do not abandon it so long as you lie, lest you will not be granted a respite and you will be afflicted by divine punishment.
>
> By God! By God! Be attentive to struggling in the cause of God by your possessions, lives, and words. It is incumbent on you to strengthen the ties of friendship and affection. Do not neglect from generosity. Do not turn your back to each other. Do not sever the ties of kinship and friendship. Do not be inattentive to enjoining good and forbidding wrong lest you will be overcome by vicious people and your supplications will not be divinely answered.
>
> O descendants of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib! Beware to not take your hands out of your sleeves to dip them in the blood of Muslims, saying that the Commander of the Faithful was murdered: take advantage of it to shed blood![1]
>
> Beware that you should only execute out of punishment the one who made an attempt on my life. Behold! If I die from this blow, retaliate by striking only one blow on him. Do not mutilate him, as I heard the Messenger of God saying, 'Do not mutilate even a rabid dog.'

The Imam's (A) children were silent, listening to their father's invigorating words, as they were overcome with such unbearable grief. The Imam (A) lost consciousness at the close of his testament and when he regained consciousness said, 'Ḥasan, I have a word for you. This is my last night. When I am dead, wash and shroud my dead body with your own hands and supervise my burial service. Perform prayer for my body and bury it in secret somewhere far from Kufa.'

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[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 47.

The Imam (A) lived for two more days and passed away on 21 Ramaḍān 40 / 29 January 661 at the age of 63. His son, Imam Ḥasan (A), washed his dead body and performed prayer over him by saying *Allāhu akbar* (God is Greatest) seven times and also saying, 'Behold that saying this formula seven times will not be repeated for any other dead body.' His remains were buried in Gharī (present-day Najaf) in the vicinity of Kufa. He served as caliph for four years and ten months.[1]

Mourning for ʿAlī (A)

After the martyrdom of the Imam (A), Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī (A) delivered a speech in which he praised and glorified God, invoked God to grant the Prophet His blessings, and further said, 'A man passed away tonight who was neither known by former generations nor will the like of him be known to the coming generations. When he fought, he was accompanied by Gabriel on the right hand side and by Michael on his left. By God! The night on which he passed away coincides with the demise of the Prophet Moses (A), the ascension of the Prophet Jesus (A), and the revelation of the Qur'an. Know that he did not leave behind any gold or silver but seven hundred dirhams which were his savings from his stipend by which he intended to hire a servant for his family.'[2]

Qaʿqāʿ ibn Zurārah rose up and said, 'May God Almighty be satisfied with you. O Commander of the Faithful! By God! Your life was a key to all good things. Had people been obedient to you, divine blessings would have showered on them; but they showed ingratitude for blessings and chose this world at the expense of losing the hereafter.'[3]

Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī versified the following elegy for ʿAlī (A):

Say to Muʿāwiyah ibn Ḥarb that the eyes of scolding ones better be blind.

Did you make us mourn in the month of Ramaḍān for
[the loss of] the best of people?

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[1] *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 313; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ*, p. 112; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 213.

[2] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 2, p. 213.

[3] Ibid.

You took the life of the best of people who rode beasts and tamed them,
the best of people who wore sandals,
the best of people who recited the oft-repeated verses (*āyāt al-mathānī*)[1]
and the Manifest Book.
If you see the countenance of Ḥusayn's father,
you will see that his splendour is visible above those who see him.
O 'Alī! The Quraysh, wherever they are,
are aware of your excellence in lineage and faith![2]

Another elegy versified for 'Alī (A) is by Ṣa'ṣa'ah ibn Ṣawḥān who was synonymous with eloquence and was endowed with a splendid gift of repartee. In his elegy versified for the Commander of the Faithful, he says:

May my parents be your ransom! O Commander of the Faithful!
May you rejoice at being granted divine blessings!
Indeed, you were pure of lineage, forbearing, and a true hero.
You fulfilled your wishes and gained abundantly.
In your transactions with God, you hastened towards your Lord.
You were kindly admitted by Him by His bearing you glad tidings.
You were encircled by angels and you dwelled next to
the Chosen One [Prophet Muḥammad].
God made you dwell beside him and granted you an exalted rank similar to his;
And you were allowed to partake of His cup.
We invoke our Lord, who granted us the blessing,
of following you and your deeds and befriend your friends;
and be the enemies of your enemies, to raise us from
the dead and make us accompany you;
as you excel others in attaining to such exalted rank;
and you attained such unsurpassed high station.

---

[1] The seven verses of the first *sūrah*.

[2] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 428; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 4, p. 116; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 394; *Aghānī*, vol. 11, p. 122. In his *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī [al-Iṣbahānī] attributes these verses that constitute a part of an elegy in twenty-one couplets to Umm al-Haytham bint al-Aswad.

You struggled most excellently on the side of the Prophet;
in the cause of God, aiming at consolidating the religion of God;
and the prophetic tradition; you vanquished the insurgency,
and established Islam on solid foundations.
You established order in religion and surpassed in attaining noble qualities.
You were the first to answer the Prophet's call;
and to accord precedence above all to obeying him.
You were the first to render him assistance and make sacrifices in the cause of God. You unsheathed your sword to render him aid.
All obstinate wrongdoers were defeated by you.
All disbelievers were humiliated by you.
Disbelief, polytheism, and wrongdoing were uprooted by you;
you caused the death of those who deviated from the straight path, those who rose against the truth.
O Commander of the Faithful! May you rejoice at the noble qualities divinely bestowed upon you.
You were the closest companions of the Prophet,
you preceded others in embracing the Islamic faith,
you excelled others in knowledge, understanding, firm belief,
courage, valour, and the sacrifices made in the cause of Islam.
We pray to God to be granted the like of your rewards,
as you were the key to all good things and
you had closed to us the door to all unpleasant things.
It was by your martyrdom that the doors to unpleasant things were opened to us and those to good things were closed on us.
Had people listened to your words, they would have been showered,
by good things; but alas! They preferred this world over the hereafter!

The Khawārij and other enemies of Islam rejoiced at that horrifying crime and praised Ibn Muljam for his delinquency. A Khārijī by the name of 'Imrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān al-Waqāshī versified these lines about Ibn Qutham:

What a blow it was from a righteous man, aiming

but at attaining the satisfaction of the Lord of the Throne.
When I remember him, I believe that in the presence of God
his scale is heavier than that of others.

Qāḍī Abū Ṭayyib Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Shāfiʿī wrote these verses:

What a blow it was from a criminal who
aimed but at destroying the pillars of religion.
When I remember him, I pile up curses on ʿImrān and Ḥiṭṭān.
May divine curses be always on him, overtly and covertly.
You are the dogs of hell as attested in the rules of religion.[1]

The resplendence of the life of such an exalted and illustrious man, who had been born in the Kaʿbah and was martyred in the mosque, faded away; a man whom only he alone stood next to the Prophet (S) in excellence. He was unsurpassed in his struggles and sacrifices in the cause of God, in his unrivalled knowledge of the secrets of existence, and in his other noble qualities. His character was an array of noble and seemingly contrary qualities which may not be found, in their entirety, in any other person.

You are endowed with various qualities,
as a result, you are unsurpassed by others.
You are righteous, versed in politics, forbearing, and courageous,
you are an annihilator, an ascetic, a poor man, and a generous one.

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[1] *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 427. Other responses in verse to the two couplets by ʿImrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān are also included by al-Masʿūdī.

The present author most ashamedly comes to the end of his book, well aware that he has failed to even present an imperfect depiction of the holy and unrivalled character and noble qualities of Imam ʿAlī (A). Nevertheless, he is content to have acted upon his obligation and by holding a worthless bundle of cotton yarn has joined the line of bidders desiring to purchase [the one who is like Zahrā'’s] Joseph. May he intercede with the Lord on the behalf of this humble servant of God.

Ja'far Subhani
Imam Sadiq Institute, Qum
15 Shawwāl 1408 / 31 May 1988

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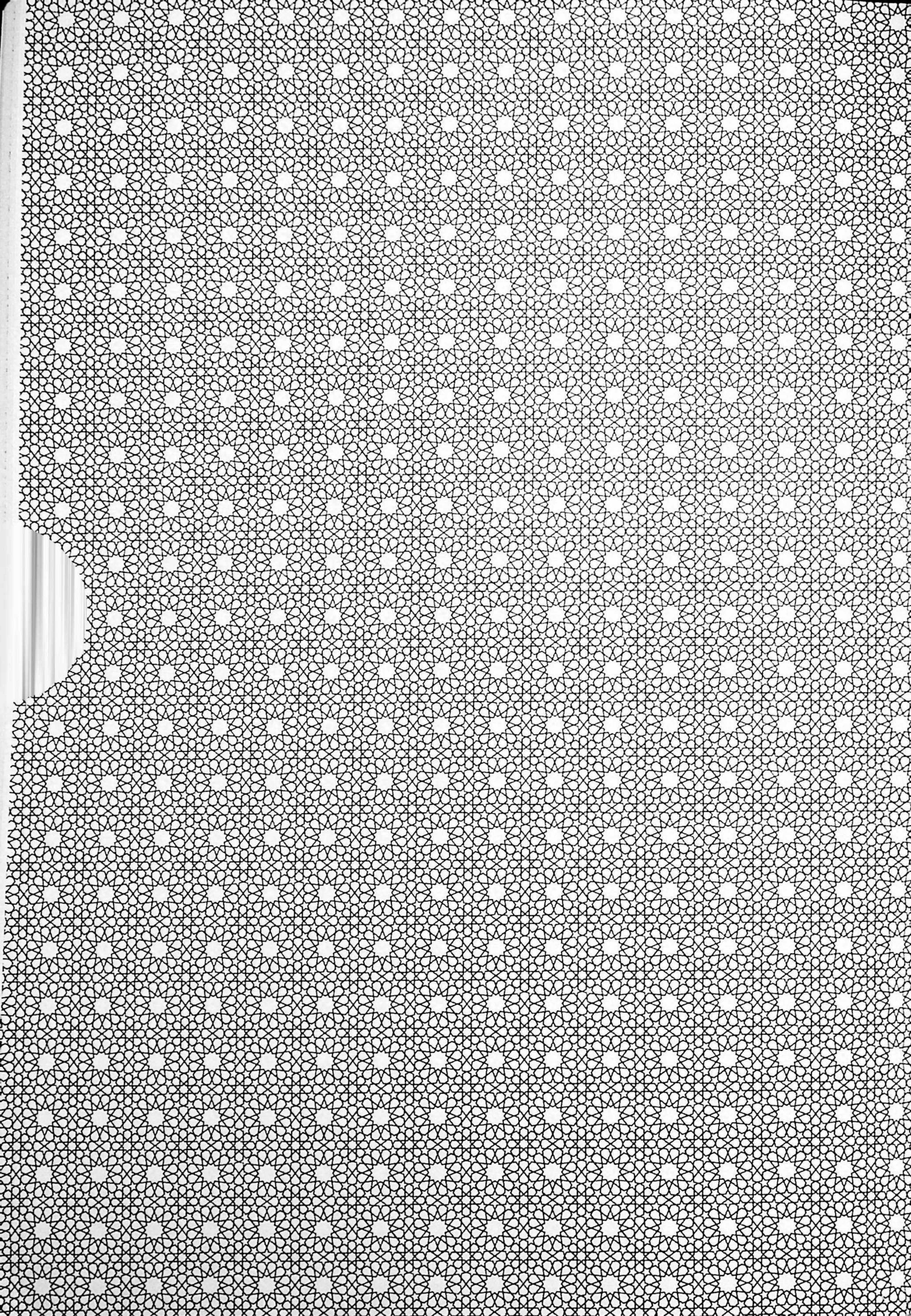

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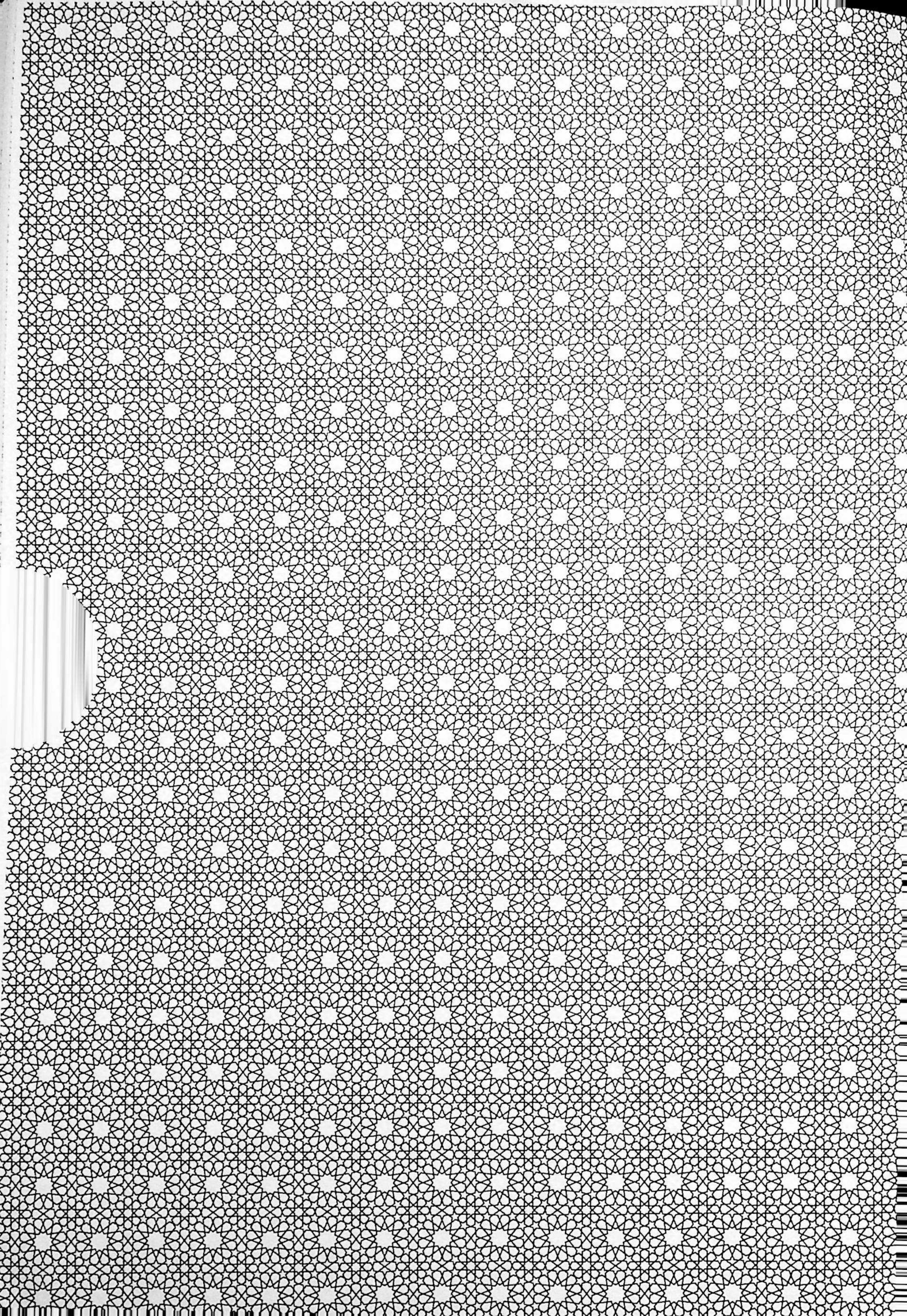

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